







*Jno. W. Boswell.*

A  
SHORT HISTORY  
OF  
METHODISM.

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NASHVILLE, TENN.; DALLAS, TEX.:  
PUBLISHING HOUSE OF THE M. E. CHURCH, SOUTH.  
BARBER & SMITH, AGENTS.  
1900.

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## PREFACE.

THE principal facts and features of Methodism are briefly detailed in this little volume. In its preparation the author has availed himself of information furnished by the best histories of the Church. Indebtedness is hereby acknowledged to Stevens's "History of Methodism," Stevens's "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," McTyeire's "History of Methodism," Tyerman's "Life of Wesley," and McClintock and Strong's Cyclopædia. Quotations from other sources are duly credited.

Should this Short History create in the minds of readers a desire to learn more of Methodism, and inspire in them a greater love for the Church, the author will be satisfied.

JOHN W. BOSWELL.

NASHVILLE, TENN., *October 1, 1900.*



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# A SHORT HISTORY OF METHODISM.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ORIGIN OF METHODISM IN EUROPE—JOHN WESLEY.

METHODISM was not the outcome of any disturbance in the Church. No question of doctrine or polity was in agitation at the time of its origin. The excitement produced by Martin Luther's protests against the corruptions of Rome had subsided. The troubles incident to the rupture between the English crown and the papacy had long since quieted. The reformation was complete, and the Church of England was firmly established. There was profound peace. The birth of Methodism was as quiet as the bursting of a bud into blossom, but it was as easily and as quickly discovered as a full-blown rose. The germ was planted long before there was anything like an organization, and ten years before the first Methodist meetinghouse was built. It began with John Wesley, who, in company with his brother Charles and about ten other young

men, students at Oxford University, formed a club for the purpose of prayer and study of the Scriptures. This was in November, 1729. They were so devout and consistent in their daily walk, and so systematic in their devotions, that, notwithstanding they were the farthest removed from anything like ancient pharisaism, they attracted the attention of their godless fellow-students, who ridiculed them as "Bible Bigots," "Bible Moths," the "Godly Club," etc. One student, not so irreverent as others, but more learned, declared that a "new sect of Methodists had sprung up." The title was appropriate: it clung to them, they accepted it, and in due time it was applied to the Societies, and finally to the organization of the Church in America and to the Wesleyans in England.

John Wesley was the inspirer of the movement, the very life of it, in fact, from its beginning to the close of his life, March 2, 1791. This remarkable man was born at Epworth, Lincolnshire, England, June 17, 1703. His father was a clergyman, and rector at Epworth for the long period of thirty-nine years. His mother, Susanna Wesley, a richly endowed woman mentally and morally, was the daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley, who was also a

clergyman of an honorable family, and was himself a man of exalted character. Wesley had every advantage necessary to the formation and development of a strong and symmetrical personality. His advantages were not neglected. He possessed a quick mind and a trustful heart. He learned rapidly, and feared God. He was far above the average boy in all respects. Through the influence of the Duke of Buckingham he entered the Charterhouse School, London, before he was twelve years of age; and when only sixteen he was elected to Christ Church College, Oxford. Here his remarkable proficiency was recognized, and secured for him a fellowship in Lincoln College in 1726. Eight months after this, and before he received his degree of Master of Arts, he "was selected as Greek lecturer and moderator of the classes."

Prior to the organization of the "Holy Club," Mr. Wesley was ordained to the ministry in the Church of England, first as a deacon in 1725, and then as a presbyter in 1728. But up to the time he was thirty-five years of age he was almost an unknown man except in the literary circles of Oxford University. In these circles he was acknowledged as a man of accurate and extensive learning, and an

eloquent and logical preacher. Strong efforts were made to induce him to take the care of Epworth Church, made vacant by the death of his father in 1735. He reluctantly consented, but before his application had been transmitted to the authorities the place was given to another. This, it is said, rather pleased him, as he preferred to retain his place as Fellow of Lincoln College. Shortly after this he was induced to accompany General Oglethorpe to Georgia as missionary chaplain. Here he employed his time in preaching to the colonists and the Indians. In this work he achieved no signal success. After little more than two years in Georgia, he returned to England. In May, 1738, he attended a Moravian meeting in London, and during the service, the subject of the discourse being Luther's comment on "justification by faith," he "felt his heart strangely warmed." From this hour he dated his experience in grace, and the beginning of his career as an evangelical preacher, the like of whom had not been seen since the days of St. Paul.

Wesley was "a bright and shining light"—as zealous and effective as he was brilliant and evangelical. Thousands were attracted to his ministry wherever he went. It is esti-

mated that after he began "field preaching" ten thousand people in some places came to hear him, and on one occasion, it is said, as many as twenty thousand persons were present. He was tireless in his work—riding, and preaching generally from two to four times a day. In supervising the work that so rapidly and wonderfully developed, he was compelled to travel about four thousand five hundred miles a year. He went always on horseback until he began to grow old, when he was forced to take a carriage. During the more than fifty years of his Methodist ministry he traveled two hundred and fifty thousand miles and preached forty-two thousand times. Besides all this, he carried on a heavy publishing business, and "edited, wrote, translated, or abridged" not less than two hundred books and pamphlets, on theological, philosophical, biographical, medical, and other subjects; all for the good of humanity. His books were sold through the preachers for the special benefit of the Societies. One historian says: "He was always at work when awake, yet was never in a hurry. His industry and unremitted activity never were, never can be, excelled." He was abstemious in the matter of diet. He determined by actual experiment,



repeated until satisfied, how much sleep he needed, and allowed himself that much—no more, no less. He trained himself to go to sleep in a moment, and to awake at the right time. He arose at four o'clock every morning. In business his rule was: "Make all you can, save all you can, and give all you can." He lived up to the rule conscientiously. He made many thousands of pounds. He wasted nothing, but died poor because he had devoted his savings to the cause of God.

In personal appearance Wesley was described, when in the prime of life, as "neither tall nor fat." Tyerman says he "was rather below the middle size, but beautifully proportioned, without an atom of superfluous flesh; yet muscular and strong, with a forehead clear and smooth, a bright, penetrating eye, and a lovely face, which retained the freshness of its complexion to the latest period of his life." In his dress there was nothing peculiar: his clothes were fashioned after the style of the day in which he lived. He was an English gentleman of the eighteenth century without any of the stiffness of the nobility. In social life he was pleasant and agreeable, a fine conversationalist, witty, full of anecdote, courteous in his manners, and at ease among the rich and the poor.

Mr. Wesley did not marry until he was nearly forty-eight years of age; and though late in life for a matrimonial alliance, he seems to have entered into it without due consideration, depending more on the judgment of a friend than on his own. He was married February 19, 1751, to Mrs. Vazille, a widow with a small fortune, every cent of which was settled on her and her children. The marriage was a very unfortunate one. Mr. Wesley did not suffer his new relation as husband to hinder him in his work. For a time Mrs. Wesley accompanied him, but the travel and manner of life—all new to her—were by no means according to her tastes; and as she had no real sympathy with her husband's calling, she soon tired of it and declined to accompany him to his appointments, and finally refused her consent to his oft and long-continued absences from home. She became exceedingly jealous; would travel miles, without his knowledge, to watch him as he passed along the roads; would intercept and open his letters, with the vain hope of catching something on which to base a charge. More than once she left him, but Mr. Wesley would induce her to return. At last she departed, vowing that she would return no more. Mr. Wesley took the matter philosophically.

Conscious that he was not at fault, he said: "I did not forsake her; I did not dismiss her; I will not recall her." Notwithstanding his unhappy home surroundings, his life work continued without interruption and with increasing success.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE FIRST SOCIETIES.

As thoroughly consecrated and methodistic as Wesley was—a man of one book—he was in 1738 “utterly without a plan in life.” His experiment as missionary to Georgia proved a failure, and so far as anybody knows he had made no further arrangements for the future. His one desire was to save souls. This was like “fire in his bones,” but nothing like an organized and systematically planned campaign with even that object in view had entered his mind. Circumstances forced him to adopt plans and employ agencies which under other conditions would have been rejected. Having fully embraced the doctrine of “justification by faith only,” and happy in the experience, he preached it with earnestness. He also insisted on “instantaneous conversion.” His preaching was wonderfully effective. The people were aroused, and hundreds turned to the Lord. These things greatly offended the clergy, and they began to oppose him. One by one the pulpits of the Established Church were closed against him, until finally he had

access to none. This naturally limited his sphere of operations. He was confined in his ministry "to the rooms of the Societies, to prison chapels, and to hospital wards."

About this time Mr. Whitefield, who was preaching with great success, invited him to come to Bristol. He accepted the invitation, and on his arrival was shocked to find that his old friend and club-mate at Oxford was preaching in the open air. This was contrary to Church order—a proceeding which Mr. Wesley regarded as almost criminal. His passion for souls and his good common sense came to his relief. He was an eyewitness of the great success of Whitefield's preaching, and at once acknowledged in it the hand and power of God. As his experience in the Moravian meeting was the beginning of his real life in Christ, so his coöperation with Whitefield at Bristol was the beginning of his evangelical career. He yielded his lifelong prejudices, and preached for the first time in the open air. This was on Monday, April 2, 1739.

As yet there were no Methodist Societies. They followed, not of design, nor as the opening of a prearranged programme. They were providential. There is difference of opinion as to the date of the first Society. One writer

affirms that it was organized in Bristol, April 2, 1739. This, it will be noted, was the very day on which Mr. Wesley began his open-air preaching. The statement lacks confirmation, and the presumption is that the author mistook one event for the other. But whether or not the first Society was organized on the date named, there can be no doubt that Societies were organized in Bristol during the year 1739. Dr. Stevens says: "His [Wesley's] Societies in Bristol grew so rapidly that he was compelled to erect a place of worship for their accommodation; . . . on the 12th of May, 1739, the corner stone 'was laid with the voice of praise and thanksgiving.' This was the first Methodist chapel in the world." (See Stevens's History, Vol. I., page 124.)

Mr. Wesley says the "United Society" had its rise in London. The difference in the two statements is reconciled on the supposition that the Bristol Societies were organized independently of each other, while the Societies in London named by Mr. Wesley were organized by him as the UNITED SOCIETY, and to be exclusively under his direction. Other Societies for religious instruction existed in London, but some of them were under the direction of the Moravians and others controlled by church-

men. Mr. Wesley affiliated with the Moravian Societies, but on account of a disagreement he withdrew and carried with him about twenty of the members.

The following is Mr. Wesley's own account of the rise of Methodism, and is accepted by Methodists generally throughout the world: "In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together; which, from thenceforward, they did every week, viz., on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), I gave those advices from time to time which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meetings with prayer suitable to their several necessities. This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places."

The idea of forming Societies for spiritual instruction and improvement was not original with Mr. Wesley. Societies of similar character existed as far back as the middle of the sixteenth century. They were approved by some of the bishops of the Established Church, but were disapproved by Queen Elizabeth, who issued a decree against them May 7, 1577. They were finally stamped out "in a violent way" by Whitgift, who became archbishop of Canterbury in 1583. Like Societies arose again in the next century. Woodward, in his "Rise and Progress of Religious Societies," says: "About 1666 several young men in London, being brought to serious convictions by the preaching of their clergy, and applying to their ministers for religious counsel, were advised by them to meet together once a week, and apply themselves to good discourse and things wherein they might edify one another." These meetings, it is affirmed, gave Mr. Wesley "the idea of those social meetings in which the laity were to sustain an important part, though still under the guidance of their pastors, and in which the strength of Methodism consists."

Mr. Wesley's Societies, in the course of time and as a matter of convenience, were divided



into smaller companies called classes, over each of which one was appointed who was styled "the leader." This official was charged with a temporal as well as a spiritual oversight. For further information on this point, see the Book of Discipline of any Methodist body.

It must be borne in mind that the Society was in no sense a Church. When the members met there was prayer and exhortation for mutual benefit, but never anything like formal service or the administration of the sacraments. Mr. Wesley said: "Such a Society is no other than a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness; united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation." The United Society was the beginning of organic Methodism.

## CHAPTER III.

### METHODISM PLANTED IN AMERICA.

METHODISM is essentially missionary in its spirit and operations, though it can hardly be said that its beginning in America is due to any mission agency. Philip Embury, a local preacher from Ireland—a carpenter by trade—who had settled in New York, held the first Methodist service in that city in 1766. This was the first of the kind in the New World. The service was not altogether voluntary on the part of Embury. But for the stirring appeal of Barbara Heck, a zealous Irish Methodist, notable in the early history of the Church, it is doubtful whether Embury ever would have been heard of in connection with the Methodist movement. Her strong exhortation roused the lukewarm preacher, and forced him to duty. He organized a Society and began to preach, first in his own house, then in a hired house, and afterwards in the “Rigging Loft” known as the birthplace of American Methodism. Embury continued in this work about three years, much of the time having the assistance of Captain Thomas Webb, of the Brit-

ish army, a local preacher of great earnestness, very popular in the army and among the people. Embury surrendered his work to the first missionaries sent from England by Mr. Wesley. These missionaries, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, landed in Philadelphia in the autumn of 1769. They began to preach immediately, first in the city, and then in different country towns as they made their way to New York. They were preceded in New York full two months by Robert Williams, the first itinerant preacher to reach America. Williams was not an appointee of Mr. Wesley, but a volunteer, who, hearing of Embury's success, "spoke to Mr. Wesley, offering to go, and asking his sanction and authority." Wesley consented, "with the understanding that he was to 'labor in subordination with the missionaries who were about to be sent out.'" (McTyeire's History of Methodism.) Williams proved to be a very useful man. He first labored in New York, frequently making tours into the country. He was the apostle of Methodism in Virginia and North Carolina.

Robert Strawbridge, another Irish immigrant, began to preach in Maryland about the same time Embury began in New York. He

settled on Sam's Creek in Frederick county, where he built what is known in Methodist annals as the Log Meetinghouse. It is to this day a question which church was first erected, the John Street Church in New York, or the Log Meetinghouse on Sam's Creek.

Strawbridge was a man of great zeal, a successful evangelist, and a devoted preacher of Methodist doctrine; but he was irregular. As a local preacher, he controlled his own movements. His name occurs in the Minutes of 1773 and 1775 as an itinerant, and disappears, Stevens says, "unaccountably." His irregularity consisted not so much in the fact that he made his own appointments, and persisted in serving Sam's Creek and Brush Forest Societies, as in administering the sacraments contrary to the advice and wishes of his brethren. He was unordained, as all of Mr. Wesley's preachers were up to that date. The Methodists were, in America as in Europe, dependent on the Church of England for the Lord's Supper and the baptism of their children. This was not agreeable to all American Methodists. A long and perplexing discussion arose between what was denominated the "Sacramental party" and those who favored continuing their relations with "the Church." Those

who held with the "Sacramental party" undertook to carry their views into practice. Mr. Strawbridge was among the number. He had been instrumental in the conversion of many people—he had received them into the Society; the church was not always accessible, even had it been perfectly agreeable with all the Methodists to avail themselves of the church's altar, and under the circumstances Strawbridge deemed it his duty to act toward his converts the part of minister as well as preacher. The Conference of 1773 allowed him to exercise the functions of an ordained preacher, provided he would do so under the direction of Mr. Rankin, who by appointment of Mr. Wesley was superintendent of the work. This Strawbridge declined to do. He died in 1781, remaining useful to the end.

Francis Asbury was the apostle of American Methodism—called and sent of God. He was born of Methodist parents at Handsworth, England, August 20, 1745; was converted at thirteen years of age; began to preach at sixteen as a local preacher; at twenty-two joined the itinerant ranks; and four years later was commissioned by Mr. Wesley as a missionary to America, with Richard Wright as his com-

panion. He landed in Philadelphia October 27, 1771. The next year Mr. Wesley appointed him "General Assistant in America." This means that he was superintendent of the work, and responsible to Mr. Wesley, there being nothing like an independent organization in the colonies.

The Societies in America were not in all respects conformed to Mr. Wesley's original model, and discipline was not strictly enforced. For these reasons he became dissatisfied, and sent over Thomas Rankin, an older and more experienced man than Mr. Asbury. He superseded the latter by virtue of his seniority, but was really selected by Mr. Wesley to take his place as superintendent. It required the combined strength of both men to bring the colonial Methodists into perfect harmony with Mr. Wesley's plans, owing to the resistance of both the preachers and the people. Independence was in the air. "Without them it seems probable that it [Methodism] would have adopted a settled pastorate, and become blended with the Anglican Church of the colonies, or, like the fruits of Whitefield's labors, been absorbed in the general Protestantism of this country." (Stevens's History of Methodism.)

As much as American Methodism owes to Rankin, it might have been in debt to him a great deal more had he thoroughly understood American nature and fully identified himself with American life. This he could have done without any compromise of principle. But he was too rigid in discipline, and rather injudicious. His administration, on the whole, was not the best for the embryo Church. The American sentiment was too strong for him. He determined to return to England. Some time during 1777 he made his way to Philadelphia from Maryland. There he spent the winter, the British being in possession of the city, and on March 17, 1778, he set sail for his native land.

The care of all the churches at last fell upon Asbury. Mr. Wesley in due time came to recognize his ability and worth, and fully trusted him. That trust was never betrayed, nor did he ever for a moment falter in his work, or decline in his devotion to the cause of the Master or of Methodism. He was an evangelist of the first order, as energetic and systematic as Wesley himself. Soon after reaching America he saw what was needed to make Methodism more successful. The imperative need was the dispersion of the preach-

ers. They inclined too much to the cities and needed to be scattered into the country districts, and this he effected as speedily as possible. By so doing he gave offense to some who preferred city life. He also saw the vast possibilities of the New World, and the opportunity presented to an effective itinerant ministry for the propagation of the gospel, and predicted that one day the great West would be the empire of Methodism. How completely have his predictions been verified!

Asbury, as compared with Pilmoor, in point of education was poorly equipped in the beginning of his ministry; but he was studious, and acquired a good stock of information, including a fair knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages. As a preacher he was perhaps the equal of any of his English associates. But he surpassed them all in administrative ability, was a man born to govern, and seemed instinctively to know what Israel ought to do. He may have been acquainted with parliamentary usages, but did not allow them to hamper him in his administration. He simply governed. Such was the man who, under God, was the chief instrument in shaping Methodism in America.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FIRST CONFERENCES—PREPARING FOR ORGANIZATION.

THE first Conference of Methodism held on American soil convened in Philadelphia, July 4, 1773. Thomas Rankin presided. The members “in Society” numbered 1,160. Eleven years later, notwithstanding the long war with England, the company had swelled to 14,988, with several hundred local preachers and exhorters, eighty-four itinerant preachers, between sixty and seventy chapels, and a mighty host of Methodist friends. The Societies were widely scattered, being located in every part of the Union except the New England states. Nearly nine-tenths of the members lived south of Mason and Dixon’s line.

At the close of the war of the Revolution, not one of Mr. Wesley’s missionaries was left in America, save Mr. Asbury. His sympathies were with the colonies in their struggle for independence. Even had not this been the case, he would probably have remained. He believed it to be his duty to care for “the sheep in the wilderness” which God had so

graciously committed to his hands. This duty was more clearly impressed upon him when he saw them deserted by other shepherds—for not only did the Methodist missionaries return to England, but the clergy of the Established Church also deserted the country.

In this deplorable spiritual condition, entirely without the sacraments, the Methodists began to clamor. They could not see why their own preachers, who had been instrumental in bringing them to Christ, should be forbidden “to give them the whole gospel.” They recognized the importance of order and ordination, but they argued the law of expediency. Many preachers sympathized with the clamorous laymen, particularly those in the south. Much friction was created, and great caution became necessary to preserve the unity of the brotherhood. Naturally the matter was discussed in the Conference. At the session of 1777, the fifth annual meeting, in which it appears the question was first discussed, it was decided that the preachers should “pursue the old plan as from the beginning.” And it was added, in answer to the question, “What alteration may we make in our original plan?” “Our next Conference will, if God permit, show us more clearly.” The same action, how-

ever, was taken as at the session the year before, but, as one historian says, "with considerable difficulty," as a large majority favored immediate action.

In 1779 there were two Conferences. The first was held in Kent county, Delaware, in April; the second at Fluvanna, Virginia, in May. The first has been called "a preparatory Conference," but really it was held for the convenience of Mr. Asbury, who was there in retirement on account of excitement incident to the war. The Fluvanna Conference was the legitimate body, as the session had been voted to that place at the preceding meeting. The question of the ordinances was legitimately before the Conference, as action at the previous session had not been taken, but postponed to this. The preachers were mainly agreed on the subject, and resolved to administer the ordinances. They accordingly constituted four of their number, Philip Gatch, Thomas Foster, Le Roy Cole, and Reuben Ellis, "a Presbytery" to ordain themselves, and then such of the preachers present "as were desirous of receiving ordination." These instructions were followed.

The action of the Fluvanna Conference came near resulting in a serious rupture. A large

number of preachers thought it premature, and because it had not been advised by Mr. Wesley they were dissatisfied. The Conference adjourned to meet at Manakintown, Va., May 8, 1780. Asbury, who had been designated at the Kent Conference as General Assistant, "called a Conference of the more northern preachers" to meet in Baltimore two weeks in advance of the regular session. The object of this meeting was to devise some way to check the independent movement of the Conference on the "sacramental question." Francis Asbury, Freeborn Garrettson, and Nicholas Watters were appointed a committee (Garrettson called them "delegates") to labor with the southern brethren "to bring them back if possible" to "original usages." At the Manakintown Conference the committee proposed the suspension of the administration of the ordinances for one year, and in the meantime to communicate with Mr. Wesley and abide by his judgment. This proposition, after much debate and earnest prayer, was unanimously agreed to, and harmony was restored. At the Conference of 1781, Garrettson says: "We received Mr. Wesley's answer, which was that we should continue on the old plan until further direction." There was not a

dissenting voice, and the preachers “went on harmoniously.” They were all flaming evangelists. Their object was to save souls, and if by waiting awhile they could secure what they deemed their ministerial rights, they could afford to bury their differences and go on with their soul saving. With this one desire they entered every open door, and the Lord “confirmed the word with signs following.”

The Methodists constantly grew in numbers, and the necessity for the sacraments daily increased. Thousands of children were growing up never having been baptized, and preachers were filling pulpits with great usefulness who had never even partaken of the holy communion. Thomas Rankin had returned to England and confirmed the reports of the wonderful success of Methodism. Letters continued to go to Mr. Wesley. He was convinced that the time to act had arrived. The colonies were free and independent, and the English Church, deprived of State revenue, had abandoned the field. Mr. Wesley had long since been convinced that the doctrine of apostolic succession as held by the Anglican Church was a fable, and that he had a perfect right to ordain to the ministry. His scruples on this

point being at an end, he consulted trusted brethren, notably Dr. Thomas Coke and the saintly John Fletcher, and was not long in making up his mind.

Dr. Coke, though a churchman, threw himself heartily into the Methodist movement. He was already a presbyter, and Mr. Wesley ordained him bishop, or superintendent. He also ordained Thomas Vasey and Richard Whatcoat, first to the office of deacon, and the next day to the higher office of elder, or presbyter. These men were sent to America to organize the Methodists into a separate Church, and to ordain Francis Asbury "joint superintendent with Coke." The burden was now lifted from Mr. Wesley's heart, and the Societies in the New World, with a fully empowered ministry, were soon to enter upon an era of unprecedented success.

Coke and his associates sailed from England on the 18th of September, 1784, and landed, after a stormy and tedious voyage, in New York on the 3d of November. The news of their coming and their mission had preceded them, and their arrival was hailed with delight. They were met and heartily welcomed by John Dickins, then stationed in New York, and afterwards famous as the first man in

American Methodism to “frame a subscription paper to a seminary,” and as the originator, in Philadelphia in 1789, of Methodism’s greatest institution, the “Book Concern.” Dr. Coke preached in John Street Church on the evening of his arrival at New York. He also preached the two succeeding days, and on the afternoon of the third day, with his colleagues, set out for Philadelphia, which he reached on Saturday evening. Here a few days were spent, and then the company continued south to Barratt’s Chapel in Delaware, where a Quarterly Conference was to be held on November 14. Asbury and Coke met at this Conference for the first time. Coke instinctively recognized Asbury. They embraced and entered at once into each other’s confidence.

Thomas Coke, the first Methodist bishop, was born at Brecon, Wales, in 1747. His father was a man of wealth, and designed his son for a professional career, and with that end in view sent him to Oxford. No date of his conversion is given. He chose the Church as the field of his operation, and entered upon the work of a parish, Stevens says, “an unregenerate man, but a conscientious inquirer.” A conversation with Thomas Maxfield, a Methodist lay preacher, gave him clearer

views of truth. But he seems to have been fully led into the light by "an untutored but intelligent Methodist," a common laborer in a family in Devonshire. While preaching on one occasion, his heart, like Wesley's, was "strangely warmed," and he was "filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory." His preaching became too warm for his parishioners, though his church was crowded with eager hearers. He was soon "chimed" out of his church, but he found a home among the Methodists.

His entrance into the ranks of Methodism was providential. In due time he was largely to take Mr. Wesley's place, and perform services for the Master under the auspices of Methodism that no other man in the connection could perform. He was destined to "found the Wesleyan Missions in the West Indies, in Africa, in Asia, in England, Wales, and Ireland; to represent, in his own person, down to his death, the whole missionary operations of Methodism, as their official, and almost their sole, director; lavishing upon them his affluent fortune, and giving more money to religion than any other Methodist, if not any other Protestant, of his times." (Stevens.) In the prosecution of his work he crossed the



Atlantic eighteen times, and traversed frequently the United Kingdom, the United States, and the West Indies. "When a veteran of almost seventy years, he presented himself before the Wesleyan Conference as a missionary for the East Indies. The Conference objected on account of the expense, but Coke offered to pay the charges of the outfit himself to the amount of thirty thousand dollars, and so prevailed over all objections, and embarked with a small band of laborers." (McClintock and Strong.) This was his last missionary journey. He died on the voyage in 1814, and was buried in the Indian Ocean. But the mission was a success.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH.

DR. COKE sought an interview with Mr. Asbury at the earliest moment. By direction of Mr. Wesley they were to be joint superintendents, and a fair understanding as to the future management of the Church was a matter of the greatest moment. A sufficient number of preachers to form a council had already been called by Mr. Asbury. They were then at Barratt's Chapel, ready for consultation. They were immediately assembled, and after debate it was unanimously resolved to call a Conference of all the preachers. December the 24th, 1784, was the date appointed, and Lovely Lane Chapel, Baltimore, the place of meeting. About six weeks intervened between the Barratt's Chapel meeting and the time fixed for the Conference session. In the meantime Mr. Asbury had mapped out about one thousand miles of travel for the new bishop. Places for preaching on the route were designated. He also provided him with an excellent horse, and gave him as traveling companion and servant "Black Harry," who was Mr.

Asbury's "right-hand man," not only serving him as hostler and otherwise, but, being a preacher, he held forth to the colored people, and frequently to the whites, for all delighted to hear him. Bishop Coke himself heard him with pleasure.

Bishop Coke's itinerary was one of great profit to the churches. The preaching edified the people, and they availed themselves of the sacraments. In the short space of time allotted he baptized more subjects, adult and infant, than in all the years of his previous ministry. The tour was completed a week or more in advance of the meeting of the Conference. The time was spent by Coke and Asbury at Perry Hall, a noted place—the home of a Mr. Gough, a devout Methodist, and a man of great wealth. This preachers' home—well-nigh a paradise—was about fifteen miles from Baltimore. Here the leaders matured their plans for the coming Conference.

At the time of fixing the date and place of meeting, Freeborn Garrettson was "sent off like an arrow from north to south," and to dispatch messengers to the east and west, to notify all the preachers to assemble in Baltimore on Christmas eve. Garrettson faithfully carried out his part of the preliminary work.

He traveled twelve hundred miles in the intervening six weeks, preaching as he went, and returned to find sixty preachers of the eighty-four itinerants on hand ready for the opening of the session.

At ten o'clock Friday morning, December 24, 1784, began the first "General Conference" of Methodism in America. It is known in history as the "Christmas Conference," because its sessions extended through the whole of Christmas week. The Conference was held in the "Lovely Lane Chapel," a rude structure, and not altogether comfortable for old people in the cold weather. The good people of Baltimore provided a large stove for the occasion, and "furnished backs to some of the seats for the comfort of the Conference." This chapel was located in what is to-day the heart of a great city. Long ago the business of the place drove the church to other quarters, but the site is marked by an iron tablet let in the wall of the Merchants' Club building on German street, near South street, Baltimore.

Bishop Coke presided. On taking the chair his first official act was to present Mr. Wesley's letter to the brethren in North America; which letter, as its reading indicates, was Dr. Coke's authority for assuming the presidency of the

Conference. Any history of Methodism would be incomplete without this remarkable document. It is here recorded:

BRISTOL, September 10, 1784.

*To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and Our Brethren in North America :*

1. By a very uncommon train of providences, many of the provinces of North America are totally disjoined from the British empire, and erected into independent states. The English government has no authority over them, neither civil nor ecclesiastical, any more than over the states of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the Congress, partly by the state assemblies. But no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation, some thousands of the inhabitants of these states desire my advice: and in compliance with their desire, I have drawn up a little sketch.

2. Lord King's account of the primitive Church convinced me, many years ago, that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned, from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our traveling preachers. But I have still refused, not only for peace sake, but because I was as determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the national Church, to which I belonged.

3. But the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops who have a legal jurisdiction. In America there are none,

and but few parish ministers: so that for some hundred miles together there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end: and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending laborers into the harvest.

4. I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America. As also Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey to act as elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper.

5. If any one will point out a more rational and scriptural way of feeding and guiding those poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present I cannot see any better method than that I have taken.

6. It has been proposed to desire the English bishops to ordain part of our preachers for America. But to this I object: (1) I desired the Bishop of London to ordain one only; but could not prevail. (2) If they consented, we know the slowness of their proceedings; but the matter admits of no delay. (3) If they would ordain them now, they would likewise expect to govern them. And how grievously would this entangle us! (4) As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again, either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church; and we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.

JOHN WESLEY.

The Methodists of America now having before them the expressed will of Mr. Wesley, whom they regarded, under God, as the father and founder of Methodism, felt no hesitancy in accepting the plans proposed, and proceeded to organize themselves into an independent body under the title of the "Methodist Episcopal Church." Mr. Asbury, in his laconic way of stating matters, says "it was agreed" to do this, "and to have superintendents, elders, and deacons." Richard Whatcoat gives more particulars. He says: "On the 24th we rode [from Perry Hall] to Baltimore; at ten o'clock we began our Conference, in which we agreed to form a Methodist Episcopal Church, in which the liturgy (as presented by the Rev. John Wesley) should be read, and the sacraments be administered by a superintendent, elders, and deacons, who shall be ordained by a presbytery, using the episcopal form, as prescribed in the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Prayer Book." The Minutes of the Conference say: "Following the counsel of Mr. John Wesley, who recommended the episcopal mode of government, we thought it best to become an Episcopal Church, making the episcopal office elective, and the elected superintendent, or bishop, amenable to the body of ministers and preachers."

Under Mr. Wesley's instructions, Dr. Coke could have ordained Mr. Asbury to the superintendency without consulting the Conference, or in advance of the Conference for that matter; but Mr. Asbury declined to accept the high honor save on condition that the Conference ratify Mr. Wesley's appointment. This the Conference soon decided by vote without a dissenting voice. Dr. Coke was also unanimously elected. Up to this time Mr. Asbury had never been ordained, and of course had never administered any of the sacraments of the Church. On the second day of the Conference he was ordained deacon; the day following he was set apart as an elder; on the fourth day he was consecrated superintendent or bishop. The ordinations were performed by Dr. Coke, assisted by Whatcoat and Vasey. In the ordination for superintendent, in addition to the two named, he was assisted by Otterbein, a minister of the German Reformed Church, and a personal friend of Asbury's. Thirteen preachers were elected elders, ten of whom were ordained at the Conference. Three, not being present, were ordained after the session. Only three preachers were elected to the order of deacons. Only one was ordained at the time—the others the following



June. Freeborn Garrettson and James O. Cromwell were ordained with a view to work in Nova Scotia, and Jeremiah Lambert for Antigua, in the West Indies. Thus early—at the very moment of organization—did Methodism manifest a purpose to carry the gospel into the regions beyond. This was evidence of a burning zeal, the more significant considering that Methodism had scarcely taken root in the soil of the United States.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH IDEA—THE POLITY OF METHODISM.

THE founder of Methodism never contemplated the organization of a Church. Hence its polity was not thought out nor determined in advance. In the very best sense it was an evolution—the outgrowth of an intensely religious life. As it began with Mr. Wesley, it was but natural that he should assume leadership when the Societies increased in number. This was freely and fully accorded him. He soon found himself at the head of a rapidly enlarging host in different cities. This required him to travel from place to place. In his absence, band or society leaders were necessary: he appointed them. In the course of time other preachers were needed. Whitefield engaged with him in the work, as did also his brother Charles, the hymn-writer of Methodism, and a few other clergymen of the Church. But these did not suffice to meet the wants of the people. Lay preachers were called into service. They proved to be indispensable. Thomas Maxfield, the first of this

class of helpers, soon developed into a strong and popular preacher. After a course of years he left Mr. Wesley and became independent. Admitting Maxfield as a preacher was a precedent that could not be disregarded. "Many others," it is said, "of similar piety and gifts offered their services and were accepted." The precedent was not willingly set by Mr. Wesley, but finding himself disappointed in securing preachers from the pulpits of the Established Church to supply the needs of the Societies, he became reconciled; and finally, when he found men wholly devoted to the work of preaching the gospel, though not episcopally ordained, he gladly recognized them and accepted them as helpers.

The expansion of the work, and the necessity of visiting the Societies regularly and constantly, and the employment of so many preachers, rendered a Conference all-important; and as this necessity, like everything in connection with the work, seemed providentially thrust upon Mr. Wesley, the Conference was called, and became a fixture in the Church. The first one was held in London in 1744. Thus Mr. Wesley found himself to all intents and purposes an itinerant general superintendent, an office of far great-

er responsibility than that of evangelist, for in addition to his evangelistic labors there rested upon him "the care of all the churches."

Accordingly, when the American Methodists asked Mr. Wesley to give them the sacraments, he answered them by granting more than they required. He not only sent them ordained preachers, but deemed it wise to organize them into a separate and independent Church, and to give them the episcopal form of government. His purpose was carried out to the letter, and without any friction. The polity of Methodism in the United States, as determined on by Mr. Wesley, was confirmed at the Christmas Conference in 1784, and it has remained unchanged, except among the minor divisions, from that time to the present.

The polity of Methodism is episcopal—that is, the Church is governed by bishops. But the episcopacy of Methodism is not patterned after the Roman Catholic nor the Church of England order of bishops. It is in a modified form, as is naturally inferred from the fact that Mr. Wesley denominated Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury as "superintendents" instead of bishops. Methodism has never presumed that her bishops are successors of the apostles and occupy their places by "divine right."

Mr. Wesley regarded the "succession" of the English bishops as "a fable." He was convinced of this many years before ordaining Dr. Coke, "by reading Lord King's account of the primitive Church."

In early life Mr. Wesley was intensely high-church, believing it well-nigh a sin to undertake the conversion of sinners outside the walls of a church. Of these notions he became "heartily ashamed," and renounced all "systems of Church government than that of scriptural expediency." But for the rejection of his high-church views he never would have ordained Dr. Coke bishop for America. Notwithstanding that he repudiated high-church pretensions, he wrote, in 1756: "I still believe the 'episcopal form of Church government to be scriptural and apostolical'; I mean, well agreeing with the practice and writings of the apostles: but that it is prescribed in Scripture, I do not believe. . . . Neither Christ nor his apostles prescribed any particular form of Church government, and the plea of divine right for diocesan episcopacy was never heard of in the primitive Church."

There is here an apparent inconsistency: a denial of episcopacy in the primitive Church

and yet an acknowledgment that it is scriptural and apostolical." But what seems to be an inconsistency vanishes when it is understood clearly in what sense Mr. Wesley held to the one and rejected the other. He rejected episcopacy that based its claims upon succession and divine right, and that carried with it not only the idea of superiority of office, but an order endowed with priestly functions. Episcopacy, in the sense of general superintendency, he acknowledged; and while he did not accept it as ordained by Christ, he could not see that it was contrary to the New Testament or to the practice of the early Church.

Believing the episcopal form of government best adapted of all forms to carry on the work of the Church, and having purposed the establishment of that form of government for the Methodists in America, Mr. Wesley devised a plan by which he could accomplish his purpose without investing the episcopacy with high-church prerogatives, and at the same time to make them proper overseers of the flock of Christ. The particular character of episcopacy that he had in view was not in existence, or, if it was, it was quite out of his power to avail himself of what advantage it

might be able to bestow. But there was a precedent, and he believed that the "exigence of necessity" demanded that he should follow it. His ideal existed in the Church at Alexandria, which for two hundred years would allow no foreign interference in the selection and ordination of bishops, but from among their own presbyters they would select and ordain their own bishops. He believed that presbyters or elders were fully competent to ordain one of their own number to the episcopacy, and when, as he was persuaded, the "exigence of necessity" was upon him he acted on his convictions. Crowther, in his "Portrait of Methodism," as quoted by Emory, in his "Defense of the Fathers," says Mr. Wesley told Dr. Coke that he "had always admired the Alexandrian mode of ordaining bishops; . . . adding, withal, that he wished the doctor to go over and establish that mode among the American Methodists."

Whether the episcopacy is to be regarded as a third order in the ministry, ranking both the diaconate and the eldership, or is only an office in the Church, is a question quite beyond the province of this history to settle. The question is immaterial, save as it

bears on the matter of the life-tenure of the incumbent, which has never been a disturbing factor of great magnitude. It may be safely asserted that Mr. Wesley intended the episcopacy as he established it to remain a permanent branch of Church government, and not a temporary expedient to silence the clamors of American Methodists. He also intended that those who were set apart by ordination for bishops should continue in that capacity for life. It is true that in designating men for the position he called them "superintendents." This he did because he objected to the title "bishop," as carrying with it the idea of aristocracy—a pompousness that did not well accord with the simplicity of Methodism and the lowly lives of the great majority of his disciples. He would make the office as acceptable as possible to preachers and people without divesting it of any needed authority. Some time after the Christmas Conference Mr. Wesley learned that Asbury allowed himself to be called "bishop." To this he strongly objected, and wrote to the bishop to that effect; but not one word did he utter in condemnation of the episcopal functions which Asbury exercised, nor did he hint that the superintendency was a temporary ex-



pedient. All this goes to show that it was not episcopacy itself, but the assumption of a high-sounding title, to which Mr. Wesley was opposed.

There was no objection in America to the title "bishop," either among the preachers or people. In fact, it was readily accepted. It was more convenient than the legal title, and soon supplanted it in general usage. The people saw in the men who filled the office nothing to arouse prejudice; not even in Dr. Coke, who, in the language of the times, was "a born gentleman." He was a man of courtly manners, and brotherly in his attitude toward all alike. Asbury was simplicity itself, and held the reins of government with unyielding hand. In the eyes of all he was a reproduction of the apostolic style of preacher and ruler in the Church of God. Had there been any objection to the title "bishop" in the early days of American Methodism, contact with this holy man would have silenced it without difficulty.

In the beginning of the practical workings of Methodism the system was more than episcopal—it was patriarchal, Mr. Wesley being the father. He exercised more authority than any bishop ever dared to exercise, and his

right in the matter was never questioned. Up to 1784, and for several years afterwards, his authority was recognized in America as well as in England. The preachers at the Christmas Conference pledged themselves to this effect, saying: "During Mr. Wesley's life we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the gospel, ready, in matters belonging to Church government, to obey his commands." This pledge was omitted from the Minutes of the Conference before Mr. Wesley died, not because the preachers declined in respect or loyalty, but (1) because Mr. Wesley being at such a great distance from the scene of action could not always know the needs of the Church, and (2) because they had their own bishops on the ground, and the polity of the Church was sufficiently fixed and understood to allow them to carry on their own work under the direction of their own superintendents. Methodism was a fully organized Church, episcopal in its government, and the bishops knew what Israel ought to do.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH IDEA—DISCIPLINE.

DISCIPLINE is necessary to the efficient working of all organizations. Anarchy itself could never bring its promoters together, nor into any kind of coöperation, without specifying its purpose and adopting rules of conduct. This necessity is universally recognized. Churches are not excepted. Our Lord impressed this fact in the plainest and most emphatic manner, and made the Church, in the matter of moral conduct, the court of last resort.

Under the preaching of Mr. Wesley many souls were converted. He had no desire to separate them from the Established Church, but they were so entirely neglected by the clergy, and in many instances treated with such contempt, that they were as sheep without a shepherd. "They naturally longed," as one historian says, "for the fellowship of kindred spirits. At their own request, they were united together for mutual comfort and edification." Under the circumstances Mr. Wesley drew up a set of rules for their govern-

ment. These he called "The General Rules of the United Society," which, with the exception of one or two slight changes, have constituted the *magna charta* of every Methodist Society from that day to the present. The rules were prefaced by Mr. Wesley with a short account of their origin, as follows:

In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together; which, from thenceforward, they did every week, viz., on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), I gave those advices from time to time which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meetings with prayer suitable to their several necessities. This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places. (See Discipline.)

The careful reader will observe that these rules are entirely catholic in spirit, requiring nothing of an applicant for membership that is not required in the word of God. Mr. Wesley said: "All these we know God's Spirit

writes on every truly awakened heart." It has been said that these rules embrace nothing that can "hardly be called an ecclesiastical requisition." This is not strictly true, unless reference is had exclusively to doctrinal teachings, for it is certainly a fact, so far as Episcopal Methodism is concerned, that they have "become a part of the constitutional law of the Church." Every specification under a general charge of immorality may be based on one of these, save the grosser sins of men, which are so clearly inconsistent with Christian life and conduct that the trial of those guilty of them is specially provided for elsewhere. These rules, simple, comprehensive, and scriptural, have been the means of saving the Church much special legislation.

Let it be noted that the General Rules have reference only to the personal life and character of Methodists—forbidding them to do evil, on the one hand, and enjoining upon them the duty of doing good, on the other. In addition, a general code is an absolute necessity. Official character and conduct must be defined and guarded. No man in Methodism is a law unto himself, no matter how high he may be in office. The power and function of every Conference must be determined. The temporal

interests of the Church, such as the support of the ministry and the building of churches and parsonages, are to be provided for and regulated. Benevolent enterprises are to be fostered and so cared for as to be made as efficient as possible. Accordingly, the work of the Conferences has been systematized, directions are given concerning the raising and distribution of money, and boards and societies are organized, and the work of each clearly defined. Indeed, everything in Methodism is worked by rule. The law is clearly determined and set forth in the Book of Discipline.

The first Discipline of Episcopal Methodism was issued in 1785. Since the year 1808, when a delegated General Conference was provided for, a new edition of the Discipline has been published every fourth year. This is necessary on account of the "changes in economy" invariably effected at each session of the General Conference.

Observe: the polity of Methodism is fixed, and cannot be altered except by revolution; but the rules and regulations necessary to make that polity efficient are subject to amendment, or modification, or even to repeal. A majority of the General Conference suffices to change any law of the Church except such as are of a

constitutional character and guarded by restrictive rules. The changes of economy have been so numerous during the one hundred and more years since the first Discipline was published that the edition of to-day bears but little resemblance to the original issues. The essential features, however, remain.

Since the organization of the Church, important and radical measures have been introduced. In the beginning the government of the Church was entirely in the hands of the ministry. As far back as 1790 an effort was made to divide the responsibility with the laity. The effort did not succeed, but agitation continued under the leadership of James O'Kelly, who, in connection with three or four preachers, at the Conference of 1793 was announced as having "formally withdrawn" from the Church. They organized a separate Church under the title of "Republican Methodists." Its existence was of short duration. A more formidable secession occurred in 1830, when the "Methodist Protestant Church" was organized. In this body "the laity is admitted to an equal participation with the clergy in all Church legislation and government."

In 1866 the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, through her representatives, voluntari-

ly, and without previous agitation, resolved to divide responsibility with laymen, and arranged for equal lay and clerical representation in the General Conference, and also provided for lay representation in the Annual Conferences with all the privileges of the body except a vote on "ministerial character and relations." At a subsequent General Conference the words "and relations" were stricken out, so that at the present time there is no restriction on the vote of laymen except as to "ministerial character." The action of the General Conference providing for lay representation in the councils of the Church was indorsed by an almost unanimous vote of the Annual Conferences; and the provisional delegates elected by their respective Annual Conference constituents were present in full force at the next session in 1870, and participated in its deliberations. The lay delegates to the Annual Conferences, four from each presiding elder's district, were elected by the District Conference, provision for which had also been made in 1866. In the election of lay delegates to the Conferences, Annual or General, only laymen and local preachers have a voice.

Never was a measure in Church economy, of such magnitude, carried with greater ease or



with less excitement than the introduction of laymen into the lawmaking and executive assemblies of Southern Methodism. No addition of such a vast force to the working machinery of the Church ever acted with less friction. The laymen have not only worked in harmony with their clerical brethren, but have under all circumstances exhibited a conservative spirit, and a spirit of loyalty to the doctrines and usages of the Church that augurs good for all the future.

The Methodist Episcopal Church introduced partial lay representation into the General Conference about ten years subsequent to the action of the Southern branch. Strong efforts have been made to secure equal representation in the General Conference of that body, but the question, twice presented in connection with other matters about which there was great diversity of sentiment, was defeated. Not until it was brought before the Annual Conferences as a single proposition, and solely on its merits, did it command the constitutional number of votes. It was adopted by a large majority. The action of the Annual Conferences was confirmed by the General Conference of 1900.

The Discipline provides for the uniform

working of every branch of the service throughout the Church. Episcopal Methodism is connectional, that is, all the churches and members are governed by the same laws under general superintendents. In the administration of law, one man cannot deviate from the written code without being an innovator or a revolutionist. To play the rôle of either would subject him to trial for maladministration. One Methodist Episcopal Church in spirit and aim, in doctrine and discipline, and in everything else that enters into the constitution of a Wesleyan Society, is the type of all other Methodist Episcopal Churches in the world. Peculiarities of section and customs of society may in some respects differentiate congregations from each other, but the connectional bond makes them all one. They all "mind the same thing."

The Discipline as we have it to-day is the result of growth and experience. It is an evidence of the wisdom of men who all along have known how to adapt the machinery of the Church so as to secure the best administration and effect the best results. Our fathers were not so unwise as to bind on future generations rules of an iron-clad nature that could neither be worked nor changed. But set-

ting on certain principles which they deemed necessary to the efficiency of an Episcopal form of government, they left themselves and posterity free so to change the details that the Church might be able to meet the conditions of society in all coming time. How well the Church has fulfilled its mission, the records amply show.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH IDEA—THE CREED OF METHODISM.

STEVENS, in his "History of Methodism," says: "The celebrated jurist Blackstone had the curiosity, early in the reign of George III., to go from church to church to hear every clergyman of note in London. He assures us that he heard not a single discourse which had more Christianity in it than the writings of Cicero; and that it would have been impossible for him to discover, from what he heard, whether the preacher was a follower of Confucius, of Mohammed, or of Christ." Had the great lawyer attended a Wesleyan chapel, he would have heard no "uncertain sound." Possibly he would have heard no preacher "of note," but he would have heard the gospel in its purity, and by a representative of that class of men, just beginning to attract attention, who were destined to be heard around the world.

Not only the manner, but the matter, of Wesleyan preaching was new to the men of Blackstone's generation. The theology of the Church of England was Calvinistic, or rath-

er, Augustinian. It was incorporated in the "Thirty-nine Articles," and remains there to this day. The only controversy of any importance or magnitude among the early Methodists was over this question. What was called the "Calvinistic Controversy" was short and sharp, and decisive so far as the Wesleyans were concerned.

The two leading spirits of the Methodist reformation were on opposite sides of the controversy. George Whitefield was intensely Calvinistic. Wesley was Arminian. They were earnest colaborers in preaching evangelical religion, as strangely inconsistent as Whitefield's position was, but on the points in controversy they were far apart. There were no sharp personal discussions between them, but the result was separation and the organization of the Calvinistic Methodists into a separate body under the protection of Lady Huntingdon, a friend and patron of Whitefield. This body was known as the "Huntingdon Connection."

These leaders differed, not only on the decrees, but on the human will and the influence of grace. Notwithstanding the separation, Wesley and Whitefield continued on friendly terms, and more or less coöperated with each

other, as did Mr. Wesley with the Huntingdon Connection, up to 1770, the year of Whitefield's death. Mr. Wesley "preached the funeral sermon of the great chief of Calvinistic Methodism, Whitefield, in the chapels of Lady Huntingdon, in London and elsewhere."

Not until 1770, after the death of Whitefield, was the blow delivered which finally separated the contending parties, and practically ended the career of the Calvinistic Methodists. This was at the Conference of that year which adopted what was known in the succeeding controversy as Wesley's Minute on Calvinism. Lady Huntingdon was mortally offended, and never became fully reconciled to Mr. Wesley. It was three months after this Conference that Mr. Wesley preached Whitefield's funeral sermon as above noted. Had Lady Huntingdon been fully aware of the "Minute" and the effect it was destined to produce, it is more than probable that she would have forbidden Mr. Wesley the use of her chapels even for a funeral oration in memory of her devoted friend. She did at last exclude him from her pulpits altogether. Mr. Wesley's "Minute" drew the line of division distinctly between Arminianism and Calvinism, and rejected the latter as tending "morally and logically to Antino-

mianism." See Stevens's "History of Methodism," Vol. II., pages 32, 33.

The controversy which followed the adoption of Wesley's "Minute" waxed warm, and was continued for six years. It developed strong men on both sides, among whom on the Calvinistic side were Romaine, Venn, Shirley, Madan, Rowland Hill, and Augustus Toplady. Toplady was easily the foremost man on that side in mental strength, and the more readily and heartily entered into the controversy because he was a bitter opponent of Mr. Wesley. This opposition amounted apparently to personal enmity. The champion on the Wesleyan side was John Fletcher, not only the saintliest man, but the strongest, the most incisive, and the most polished writer of his day. As a polemic he was without a peer, and from beginning to the end of all his controversial work, which was voluminous, there is not to be found the least trace of bitterness or venom, the very opposite in spirit to that of his chief antagonist, Toplady, whose writings are characterized as full of "vituperation."

The long controversy ended in the complete vindication of the Wesleyan position, and fixed for all time the doctrinal status of

Methodism. Wesley was the leading teacher, as he had been the organizer of the Methodists. Long before Fletcher became a Methodist, Wesley had preached Arminianism all over England. In the very beginning of his ministry he preached free grace, and threw the responsibility of its acceptance or rejection on the individual to whom the offer of grace was made. This necessarily implied the doctrine of the freedom of the will, which, to the mind of the Calvinists, looked something like justification by works, which was as strenuously denied by Mr. Wesley as by any Calvinist on earth. It was around this thought, with its cognates, that the great battle of words was fought.

Notwithstanding Mr. Wesley's well-known theology, which he had been preaching for more than forty years, and for many years had examined and expounded in the Conferences, he had not, up to the close of the great controversy, formulated any special system of doctrine for the Methodists. Two reasons might be assigned for this: (1) There was no demand for anything of the kind. The Societies, either in general or in particular, did not constitute a separate or independent Church. Mr. Wesley and his followers were



members of the Church of England, which had a well-defined creed set forth in the "Thirty-nine Articles." True, this creed embraced some things that Mr. Wesley did not believe, but it contained much that he did believe. The creed itself was inflexible—possibly, so far as the Church was concerned, unchangeable—but somehow it seems that those who were ordained to the ministry were not bound to accept and preach it in its entirety. At any rate, the ministry as a whole were not agreed. There were two parties, an Arminian and a Calvinistic. So long as such a state of things existed in the ministry, there was no necessity to formulate a creed for the Societies; particularly so, as he was allowed to preach in his own way unmolested by the authorities. (2) Mr. Wesley and his followers were more concerned about the salvation of men and their experience in grace than they were about the decrees of God. So long as they exercised their free agency in accepting Christ and working out their salvation, they were content.

When the time was ripe for the formulation of a creed, Mr. Wesley was ready, and responded. This was in 1784, when he ordained Dr. Coke and sent him to America

to organize the Societies into a Church and to ordain the preachers. What he did in this respect is found in our Articles of Religion (see Discipline), twenty-five in number, which are an abridgment of the Articles of the English Church. The English Articles as a whole did not suit Mr. Wesley. Some of them he eliminated entirely; others were changed for the sake of simplicity and to bring them more completely into harmony with his views of the Scriptures. These Articles were placed in the hands of Dr. Coke, who, in compliance with Mr. Wesley's wishes, laid them before the "Christmas Conference"; and they were adopted by that body as "the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church." Six years later (1790) they were incorporated in the Discipline. But the Articles of Religion did not embrace all the doctrines that the Methodists believed and preached. The doctrine of justification by faith is set forth in the ninth Article, and constituted the basis of much of the preaching of Mr. Wesley, as it did that of Martin Luther and the apostles. It deserved prominence. He also insisted on the "witness of the Spirit" and the doctrine of "Christian perfection"—two other staples of Methodist

preaching, neither of which is mentioned in the Articles of Religion. However, they are fully set forth and defended in his published "Sermons" and his "Notes on the New Testament," which together constituted the "Standards of Doctrine" of the Wesleyan Methodists. This is expressly stated in Mr. Wesley's "Model Deed," prepared at an early period of his history, providing for the retention of the chapels and the filling of their pulpits with men who would preach "no other doctrines than those contained in Wesley's 'Notes on the New Testament' and in his four volumes of 'Sermons.'" (Tyerman, Vol. III., page 417.)

In the course of time Mr. Wesley was convinced that the "Model Deed" would not stand the test before the courts, because it did not sufficiently define the executive authority, namely, "the yearly Conference of the people called Methodists." To remedy this he executed, on February 28, 1784, his "Deed of Declaration," and had it "enrolled in the high court of chancery." Tyerman does not say that the "Model Deed" was enrolled in connection with the "Deed of Declaration," but the presumption is that it was, and if so, not only the chapels of the connection were

secured, but likewise the doctrinal standards became a matter of permanent record and unchangeable. If the standards of doctrine prescribed in the Model Deed received attention and ratification at the organization of the American Church in 1784, there is no record of it. If ratified at any subsequent time, it was by implication and not by specific legislation. Nevertheless both the "Notes" and the "Sermons" have been regarded as authority among American Methodists, and respected as such.

The standards of doctrine cannot be abrogated, or modified in any way. Even the General Conference, the supreme lawmaking body of the Church, cannot touch them. It is expressly provided by restrictive rule that they are to remain intact. Other constitutional measures may be changed by the co-operation of the General and Annual Conferences, but a proviso excepts the first restrictive rule which guards the doctrinal standards. Nothing short of a revolution and overthrow of constitutional Methodism can do away with the present existing standards, or add anything to the Articles of Religion. This statement applies equally to both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

## CHAPTER IX.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH IDEA—THE MINISTRY.

JOHN WESLEY was a minister of the Church of England, though not in the least affected by the high-church ideas of that establishment. He utterly repudiated the claim of apostolic succession, which was supposed to be essential to valid ordination. But he recognized the Church as competent to confer ministerial orders, and as he had been ordained a presbyter he felt authorized to ordain others. But he did not act hastily; nor did he exercise what he conceived to be his prerogative for the Societies in England. He waited until the demand for ordained preachers in America could no longer remain unheeded; then, deeming himself providentially called to supply the demand, as he clearly sets forth in the certificate of ordination of Dr. Coke, he “set apart” three men, as noted elsewhere, by the “imposition of hands,” and commissioned them to qualify, in like manner, their brethren in the United States for the administration of the holy sacraments. The ordination of Dr. Coke occurred on the second day of September, 1784.

Such was the beginning of the ordained ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Mr. Wesley's right to ordain has never been questioned among Methodists, except by such as have convinced themselves that the imposition of the hands of men in direct and unbroken succession from the apostles is essential to ordination. All such, few in number, have promptly vacated their places and gone where they belonged.

The ministry of Methodism is not professional. There may be a few men in the ranks who have chosen the work in preference to something else, but all declare themselves to be called of God. The Discipline (§ 94) prescribes a method of trying those who profess to be moved by the Holy Ghost to preach:

Let the following questions be asked, namely:

1. Do they know God as a pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire nothing but God? And are they holy in all manner of conversation?

2. Have they gifts (as well as grace) for the work? Have they (in some tolerable degree) a clear, sound understanding, a right judgment in the things of God, a just conception of salvation by faith? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly?

3. Have they fruit? Are any truly convinced of sin and converted to God by their preaching?

4. As long as these three marks concur in any one,

we believe he is called of God to preach. These we receive as sufficient proof that he is moved by the Holy Ghost.

These tests were applied by Mr. Wesley to applicants for license to preach, as shown by the "Large Minutes," and were adopted by the American Methodists at the organization in 1784. They remain as tests to this day.

Mr. Wesley's test questions were common sense in their character, and based on two facts: (1) that God calls men, and separates them unto the gospel; (2) that the Church must be satisfied of their call and qualification. God and the Church coöperate in the great work of the gospel. God calls and qualifies whom he will. The Church indorses and thus guards both itself and the world against the imposition of ungodly men.

Methodism recognizes orders in the ministry. Properly so. Not that a definite number of orders is prescribed in the Scriptures, but because a proper gradation, taking into consideration the time of probation, the character of work and course of study required of all candidates, is necessary to the efficiency of ministers, whether as pastors or laborers in a different capacity. In thus subjecting

preachers to trial, the Church obeys the apostolic injunction, "Lay hands suddenly on no man." By the time a man has passed through the whole process required to reach the higher ministry of the Church, his worth is well known—his status fairly determined by his brethren.

It is clear that Mr. Wesley modeled Methodist orders after the orders of the Church of England, save that he distinctly repudiated the idea of succession. When he selected two unordained men to accompany Dr. Coke to America to assist in the ordination of preachers for the new Church, he first ordained them to the office of deacon, and the next day raised them from this "inferior office" to the office of elder, called "the higher ministry of the Church." At the same time he ordained Dr. Coke, already an elder or presbyter, to the office of general superintendent; or, as one historian has said, "He made Coke a bishop and called him a general superintendent."

It is clear, from the facts above cited, that whether Mr. Wesley recognized three orders in the ministry or only two, he did ordain to three, and provided forms of consecration accordingly. If he intended only two *orders*, and the third man to fill only an office, and to



have no distinction save that of "chief among equals," he did not so inform Dr. Coke; nor did he write to the American Methodists to that effect. That he designed bishops to be selected from among the elders, following the example of the Alexandrian Church, was in accordance with "the fitness of things," else the Christmas Conference could have properly authorized the ordination of Mr. Asbury as a bishop without his having to undergo the process of ordination first as a deacon, then as an elder, and finally as a bishop or superintendent.

The Christmas Conference accepted Dr. Coke in his capacity as general superintendent or bishop because he was commissioned by Mr. Wesley with authority, by "the imposition of hands," as demanded by Dr. Coke, to do that which Mr. Asbury had not authority to do, though he was general superintendent of the work before Dr. Coke appeared on the scene. That which Dr. Coke had authority to do was to ordain. This Mr. Asbury heretofore had not. And even though the power to ordain inhered in the eldership, according to Mr. Wesley's view, it could not be lawfully exercised except in case of emergency. In the presence of a living bishop in the person of

Dr. Coke, the argument of emergency could not be urged by American Methodists, without repudiating Mr. Wesley's rightful authority altogether. This they never thought of doing. They accepted Dr. Coke's superintendency, with all that it implied, without question. That the Conference understood the matter in the light here suggested seems evident from the statement of Mr. Asbury, who says: "It was agreed to form ourselves into an Episcopal Church, and to have superintendents, elders, and deacons."

At the organization of the Church nothing was said about the tenure of office. It was not necessary. It would have been out of order, for Dr. Coke, who was authorized to organize the "Societies into a distinct Church," was already in orders and the superintendent of the work. By appointment of Mr. Wesley, and ordination, he superseded Mr. Asbury. The Conference elected the latter to like office, but never thought for a moment of placing a time limit to the exercise of his functions. In the absence of anything to the contrary, they naturally conceded the life tenure of office, as doubtless Mr. Wesley intended, an inference fairly drawn from the fact that the models after whom he fashioned the Methodist Epis-

curacy were retained in office for life. Had Mr. Wesley intended Dr. Coke and his successors to act merely as temporary chairmen, as do the presidents of the present Wesleyan Church in England, he would not have gone to the trouble of preparing a form of consecration and enjoining it as a part of the Methodist ritual.

The Christmas Conference took the precaution to make "the elected superintendent or bishop amenable to the body of ministers and preachers." But this is not to be understood as putting a bishop in such relation to the Church that its representatives in the General Conference may dispossess him of his office at pleasure. Amenableness "to the body of ministers and preachers" carries with it no such idea. The meaning is that he is accountable to the General Conference for his official and moral conduct, and cannot be deposed except for cause.

To limit the tenure of office, or depose an incumbent without cause, would at once destroy the importance and influence of the Episcopacy as a connectional bond, and lower the dignity of the office at once below the level of the eldership, or even of the diaconate. Men are invested with these offices, together with

all the functions that pertain to them, for life. They are never unfrocked at the pleasure of their peers. It would have been unpardonably inconsistent in the founders of Methodism to invest the inferior officers of the Church with orders for life, and at the same time subject their chief pastors to a time limit that necessarily would have required a reelection or retirement. The fathers were not thus guilty. Whatever their views in regard to the nature and prerogatives of the Episcopacy, they were consistent, and handed down to their successors an order of chief pastors, binding them to blamelessness of life and fidelity to the Church, and enjoining on the body of preachers obedience as sons in the gospel.

The majority of Methodists in America adhere to the original form of Episcopal government, and elect their bishops for life. The exceptions are, the Methodist Protestant Church, organized in 1830, which repudiates the Episcopacy *in toto*; and the Free Methodist Church, which has substituted a general superintendency for the Episcopacy, the superintendents being elected every four years. To these may be added the United Brethren in Christ, a zealous, evangelical order somewhat

after the fashion of Methodists, organized in 1800, who retain the Episcopacy but limit the tenure of office to a term of years. The Wesleyan Methodist Church of England, the mother of all, is thoroughly itinerant in spirit and practice, but has for chief executive a president who is elected annually. As a rule the Wesleyan president serves but one year.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE ECONOMY OF METHODISM—THE LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS.

METHODISM in its beginning was purely local, its originators having no thought of a system coextensive with the little English isle, much less did they dream of a great Church destined to spread its blessings throughout the whole world. But as numbers increased and opportunities multiplied, it was seen to be well adapted to the popular mind, and capable of indefinite expansion.

The controlling passion of Methodists was to spread holiness—to save sinners and promote personal piety among themselves. To accomplish this work to the best advantage, a properly organized government was necessary. The system—method itself, and perfectly suited to the times in which it was born, and worked to perfection under the administration of Mr. Wesley—must be so adjusted as to be able to meet the demands of all times and all people. A bond of union was essential, as also one central or controlling system for which everything else must exist. The one is found in the Episcopacy, or

general superintendency, the other in the itinerancy.

Mr. Wesley was the bond of union as long as he lived. When he began to grow old, seeing that no adequate provision had been made for the work after his death, he was constrained by wise men to prepare for such an emergency, lest the whole system should go to pieces, as they foresaw would be the case unless something was done. The "Deed of Declaration" was executed and recorded, and the "Legal Hundred"<sup>1</sup> appointed. This body has held the Wesleyans together and perpetuated the itinerancy unimpaired to this day. The Episcopacy and the Conferences, General and Annual, serve the same purpose in America. The history of each is important. Attention is directed first to the Conferences.

#### THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

The Christmas Conference was called the first General Conference of American Methodism, not because it was legalized as such, as

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<sup>1</sup>One hundred preachers named by Mr. Wesley in the "Deed of Declaration," to whom all authority was to be transferred after his death. All vacancies are filled by the body at its annual meeting.

is the General Conference of to-day, but because all the preachers were called together on that occasion. From the date of the first Conference in America in 1773 to the Conference of 1784 there was only one Annual Conference; but in the course of a few years, on account of the extensive territory covered and the great inconvenience of coming together, it met in two sections. One section, the northern, in point of membership and number of preachers, was much stronger than the southern section; so much so that what was done by the northern section was binding on the southern, while what was done by the southern section was not binding unless sanctioned by the northern. At the Christmas Conference both sections came together, and hence it was called a General Conference. For many years after this all the preachers were entitled to seats in the body, but the constantly increasing numbers and widening territory made it impracticable for them to assemble annually except in sections. Not until 1792 did all the preachers come together again. This they did in Baltimore, in the second General Conference of the Church. The Church had grown in these eight years from about fifteen thousand members to sixty-



five thousand nine hundred and eighty, and from less than one hundred preachers to two hundred and sixty-six.

As the Church strengthened and the Conferences multiplied—though up to 1796 no Conference had a well-defined boundary—it became necessary to change the method of constituting the General Conference. It was inconvenient and expensive to bring all the preachers together, even once in four years. Naturally the central Conferences, having easy access to the place of meeting, had a larger preponderance of representatives. Four of these central Conferences at the session of 1808 had one hundred representatives out of one hundred and twenty-nine members present on the opening day. Two Conferences lacked only three members of composing half the body. Such a preponderance of representatives from one section did not appear to be best for the whole connection.

It was proposed in 1800 to have a “delegated General Conference.” The proposition met with but little favor. It was renewed in 1804 and again rejected, but with the understanding that the Annual Conferences might consider the matter and present it at the next session with “matured suggestions.” Accord-

ingly a memorial was before the Conference of 1808. A committee of fourteen was appointed to consider the subject. This committee, after due deliberation, "reported a form of law, a species of constitution, for a representative General Conference." This report was rejected by a majority of seven in a vote of one hundred and twenty-one. Bishop Asbury and other chief advocates of the measure were "profoundly afflicted." The members from the far west, who, for the sake of representation, and because all could not attend, had been elected, together with the New England members, "retired, and threatened to return home." Consultations ensued, and the subject was resumed, the result being the adoption of the report substantially as it came from the committee, by an almost unanimous vote.

The plan adopted was mainly the work of Joshua Soule, one of the sub-committee of three who drafted the report. It provided that the General Conference should be composed of one member for every five members of each Annual Conference, to be selected "by seniority or choice." The delegates were to be taken from among the preachers in full connection with the Annual Conference. The ratio of representation was rather large, but

not too large for that day. Since then the ratio has been frequently changed. At the present time the ratio in the Methodist Episcopal Church is one clerical member for every forty-five members of each Annual Conference, with an equal number of lay members. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the ratio is "one clerical member for every forty-eight members of each Annual Conference, and an equal number of lay members. Of the lay members from an Annual Conference one may be a local preacher." The law allows an additional delegate for "a fraction of two-thirds the number which shall be fixed for the ratio of representation." It is further provided "that no Conference shall be denied the privilege of two delegates, one clerical and one lay."

The General Conference of every branch of Episcopal Methodism meets "once in four years." Special provision is made for extra sessions in case of necessity. One of the general superintendents presides over the body. In case there is no general superintendent present, the Conference chooses a president *pro tempore*. As a rule they preside from day to day in the order of their election, beginning with the senior. In the General Confer-

ence nothing is legal if done in the absence of a quorum prescribed by law. In the Methodist Episcopal Church the law requires two-thirds of the whole number of delegates to transact business. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, only a majority of the representatives is required to make a quorum.

The General Conference is the lawmaking body of Methodism. No other Conference is charged with such a responsibility. In this respect it is fully empowered under the following limitations and restrictions, namely:

(1) The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion, or establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.

(2) They shall not allow of more than one representative for every eighteen members of the Annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every sixty: *provided, nevertheless*, that when there shall be in any Annual Conference a fraction of two-thirds the number which shall be fixed for the ratio of representation, such Annual Conference shall be entitled to an additional delegate for such fraction: *and provided*, also, that no Conference shall be denied the privilege of two delegates, one clerical and one lay.

(3) They shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away Episcopacy, or

destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency.

(3) They shall not revoke or change the General Rules of the United Societies.

(4) They shall not do away the privileges of our ministers or preachers of trial by a committee, and of an appeal; neither shall they do away the privileges of our members of trial before the Church, or by a committee, and of an appeal.

(6) They shall not appropriate the produce of the Publishing House to any purpose other than for the benefit of the traveling, supernumerary, superannuated, and wornout preachers, their wives, widows, and children.

*Provided, nevertheless,* that upon the concurrent recommendation of three-fourths of all the members of the several Annual Conferences, who shall be present and vote on such recommendation, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions, excepting the first article; and also, whenever such alteration or alterations shall have been first recommended by two-thirds of the General Conference, so soon as three-fourths of the members of all the Annual Conferences shall have concurred as aforesaid, such alteration or alterations shall take effect: *provided,* that when any rule or regulation is adopted by the General Conference, which, in the opinion of the bishops, is unconstitutional, the bishops may present to the Conference which passed said rule or regulation their objections thereto, with their reasons, in writing; and if then the General Conference shall, by a two-thirds vote, adhere to its action

on the said rule or regulation, it shall then take the course prescribed for altering a Restrictive Rule, and if thus passed upon affirmatively, the bishops shall announce that such rule or regulation takes effect from that time.

The Restrictive Rules above quoted are taken from the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. They are substantially the same in the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, except the proviso in regard to the veto power of the Episcopacy, with which the Episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church has never been invested. The Methodist Episcopal Church has also so amended the third Restrictive Rule as to allow the election of Missionary Bishops, whose jurisdiction is confined to the work in foreign parts. These rules, as adopted by the General Conference of 1808, left "open to change the fundamental interests of the Church, even its theology and terms of membership," in that they provided for their suspension "by the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences together with a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference." Thus both the economy and the doctrines of the Church were virtually at the dictation of the Annual Conferences, leaving the great body of the Church

without any appeal. In 1832 this defect (for such it was) in the organic law of the Church was modified so as to require a vote of three-fourths of the members of the Annual, and two-thirds of the General, Conferences to effect a change in any of the Restrictive Rules, except the first, which was placed entirely beyond the power of the General Conference to alter. The action of 1832 remains unchanged to the present time. Very few constitutional changes have ever been made.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE ECONOMY OF METHODISM—THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

THE first Annual Conference was called by Mr. Wesley at a time when he and his followers were suffering great persecution at the hands of lawless mobs. In the midst of his troubles he indulged a natural wish and exclaimed, "Oh for ease and a resting place! Not yet, but eternity is at hand." At the same time he was deeply concerned for the success of his work, and planning for its extension. Says Stevens: "He wrote letters to several clergymen, and to his lay assistants, inviting them to meet him in London, and to give him 'their advice respecting the best method of carrying on the work of God.'" This, historically known as the "*first Methodist Conference*," began in the Foundry, London, Monday, June 25, 1744. Besides John and Charles Wesley, there were present John Hodges, Henry Piers, Samuel Taylor, and John Meriton, all ministers of the Church of England. The lay preachers present were Thomas Maxfield, Thomas Richards, John Bennett, and John Downs.



The first business transacted was the adoption of rules for the government of the Conference. This done, they considered first, "What to teach." On this point two days were spent in discussing "the theology necessary to be maintained in their preaching." They set forth distinctly the scriptural doctrines of repentance, faith, justification, sanctification, and the witness of the Spirit. At the next Conference the same subjects were carefully reviewed, and in some respects, both as to opinions and forms of expression, were modified. Three days were given to the proposition, "What to do, or how to regulate the doctrine, discipline, and practice of the ministry and the Society." Such was the germ of what is to-day the largest and strongest body of dissenters in England, numbering hundreds of preachers, traveling and local, and thousands of thoroughly evangelical members. The Annual Conference is the governing body in the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

At the date of this first Conference, Mr. Wesley had been itinerating about five years. Forty-five preachers were in sympathy and coöperation with him, besides a considerable number of local preachers. Up to this time, however, it seems they had entered into no

formal compact; but at this Conference they adopted a "Rule of Enlistment," requiring the president of the Conference to say to every candidate that it is his duty to "act in all things not according to your own will, but as a son in the gospel. As such it is your part to employ your time in that manner that we direct. . . . Above all, if you labor with us in our Lord's vineyard, it is needful you should do that part of the work which we direct, at those times and places which we judge most for his glory." Thus formally began the work of the itinerancy—the promise on the part of preachers to be obedient as sons in the gospel being made in the presence of the Annual Conference. The requirement here quoted, as originally drawn up, is almost identical in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In the Methodist Episcopal Church the whole is embodied in a set of questions covering the same ground.

The first Annual Conference of American Methodism was held in Philadelphia, beginning July 14, 1773. It was in session three days. The body was composed of ten preachers: Thomas Rankin, Richard Boardman, Joseph Pilmoor, Francis Asbury, Richard Wright, George Shadford, Thomas Webb,

John King, Abraham Whitworth, and Joseph Yearbry, all Englishmen. Rankin, as general assistant (to Mr. Wesley), presided. The Conference was conducted after the method pursued by Mr. Wesley in England. The authority of Mr. Wesley and the English Conference was fully acknowledged, and it was agreed to abide by the "doctrine and discipline of the Methodists as contained in the Minutes," which were to be the sole rule of conduct of all who desired to "labor in the connection with Mr. Wesley in America."

There were no Conference boundary lines. The whole country was open and all the territory included as far as the preachers had established Societies. Conferences regularly formed and geographically described followed in due time. The rapid growth of the Church in numbers and its spread over the vast area of the United States are marvels of the nineteenth century. The history reads like a romance.

The Annual Conference as it exists to-day in many respects is familiar to all Methodists, and to both preachers and people it is the most interesting of all the Conferences. It is in no sense a legislative body. It is purely executive. It takes cognizance only of such

business as is marked out for it by the General Conference. Nevertheless its responsibilities are great.

Until recently the Annual Conference of all Episcopal Methodist bodies was composed exclusively of preachers in full connection. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which changed its organic law in 1866 so as to admit laymen, is an exception.<sup>1</sup> In that body the law provides for four laymen—one of whom may be a local preacher—from each presiding elder's district, and these together with the traveling preachers in full connection compose the Annual Conference. The laymen are chosen by the District Conference, and have equal voice with the preachers in all matters "except such as involve ministerial character." The Conference fixes the place of meeting, and the bishops appoint the time, allowing each Conference "to sit a week at least" if necessary. The bishops preside over the Conferences, arranging the plan of episcopal visitation among themselves. If no bishop is present at the opening of a session, the Confer-

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<sup>1</sup>The question of admitting laymen to the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was before the General Conference of that body in 1900. It was fully discussed, and decided in the negative.

ence elects a president from among the traveling elders by ballot and without debate. The president thus elected is authorized to perform all the duties of a bishop except ordination.

The Annual Conference exercises supervision over all the temporal and spiritual interests of the Church within its bounds. A full report of the state of the Church is made from every mission, circuit, and station of the Conference. The report includes the number of members; the additions during the year on profession of faith, and otherwise; the number of baptisms, infant and adult; of members disposed of by certificate, death, and otherwise; of all moneys paid for the support of the ministry, and collected for the benevolent enterprises of the Church, the number of Sunday schools, officers, teachers, and scholars, and Epworth Leagues. In a word, the preacher in charge reports everything pertaining to his work. All reports are tabulated and carefully recorded by secretaries appointed for that purpose.

Every enterprise of the Church is committed to a general committee or board by the General Conference, which also requires the Annual Conferences to form auxiliary boards

or committees to look after these interests inside of their bounds. Hence there are Annual Conference Boards of Missions, Church Extension, Sunday School, Epworth League, Education, and Boards of Finance particularly charged with the duty of making provision for the wornout preachers and widows and children of deceased preachers. These interests are reviewed at every Annual Conference.

Besides all this, every preacher making application for admission into the Annual Conference is required to stand an approved examination on a course of study prescribed by the bishops. Then follows a course of reading embracing a period of four years, with annual examinations before committees appointed by the Conference.

The Annual Conference has the oversight of all the traveling preachers within its bounds. It receives them, first, on trial; then after two years, if found suitable for the general work of the itinerancy, it receives them into full connection. Thus received, they are subject to the appointing power, and bound by their vows to do the work of itinerant preachers at those times and places which are judged most for the glory of God.

Once in the hands of the appointing power,

the preacher passes out of the jurisdiction of the Conference, save that he is amenable to it for his moral and official conduct. The Conference cannot appoint him to any work, nor otherwise dispose of him, except for immorality, official misconduct, or inefficiency. As an itinerant he can be used by the bishop in the Conference that received him, or in any Conference where, in the godly judgment of the appointing power, he may be needed. Under this system every preacher has a place, and every place has a preacher. Pastorates remain vacant no longer than the time required to furnish the bishop with the information.

The character and conduct of every preacher are carefully examined by the Conference once a year, and provision is made for investigation at any time when "under report of immorality, or accused thereof in writing signed by a minister or member of the Church." In nothing are Methodists more particular than in this yearly "examination of character." This is important, since under the peculiar economy of the Church the bishop is obliged to give every man under his jurisdiction an appointment. He could not, as an overseer of the flock of Christ, send out men of impure lives. The people would not receive them.

But when the Annual Conferences “pass their character,” indorsing them as “blameless in life and official administration,” and they are sent out, it may be to a strange people, they are accepted, and enter at once into the confidence of the Church.

The wisdom of the Methodist plan is justified by more than a hundred years of usefulness. It secures the Church against the ministry of immoral men, and, as the examination includes also inquiry into general fitness for the work, it saves the Church from being afflicted and injured by men who become erratic in conduct or unsound in the faith. The Annual Conference is the preacher’s underwriter, and the people’s guarantee of a sound and faithful ministry.

The supreme moment of interest in the Annual Conference is at the close of the session when “the list of appointments” is read. It is always “to a crowded house and amid breathless stillness and deep solemnity.” So it was in the beginning. But with the making of appointments the Conference, as such, has nothing to do. This is exclusively the business of the bishop, done after full consultation with the presiding elders, who are thoroughly acquainted with the work and the workers.



## CHAPTER XII.

### THE ECONOMY OF METHODISM—THE MINOR CONFERENCES—THE QUARTERLY CONFERENCE.

THE origin of the Quarterly Conference, or meeting as it is called, dates from the first ten years of the history of Methodism, but the first time such meetings were introduced by Mr. Wesley was at the Conference of 1749, though stewards were appointed and changed several years previously. After 1749 they became part of the economy of the Connection. (See McClintock and Strong; article, "Wesleyans.")

The Quarterly Conference is the governing body of the pastoral charge, whether composed of only one church, as in the larger towns and cities, or of several—sometimes amounting to a dozen or more—as on missions and circuits. As the name indicates, it is held four times a year, the interests of the Church demanding a meeting of the officials at least that number of times. The place of meeting is fixed by the Conference, and the time by the presiding elder, who presides. In his absence the preacher in charge is president.

The Quarterly Conference is composed of

“all the traveling and local preachers, including superannuated preachers residing within the circuit or station (whether without or within the limits of the Annual Conferences to which they belong), with the exhorters, stewards, trustees who are members of the Church, and class leaders, of the respective circuits, stations, and missions, together with the superintendents of Sunday schools who are members of the Church, secretaries of Church Conferences, and presidents of Senior Epworth Leagues, if eligible, and none others.” Such is the composition of the Quarterly Conference in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the law governing reads as follows: “The Quarterly Conference shall be composed of all the traveling ministers, local preachers, exhorters, stewards, and class leaders within the charge, together with the trustees of the churches, the first superintendents of the Sunday schools, and the presidents of the Epworth League chapters within the charge: *provided*, that said trustees, superintendents, and presidents are members of our Church in the charge, and approved by the Quarterly Conference for membership therein.”

The business of the Quarterly Conference is extensive and of the very first importance. Being composed mostly of the laity living inside the bounds of the charge, and identified with all the local interests of the Church, it is readily seen that the Quarterly Conference is, so to speak, the fountain head. Success in Church work depends largely on the Quarterly Conference. It opens the way for the preacher, or blocks his path and renders success impossible.

The Quarterly Conference stands guard at the door to the ministry. Originally license to preach, or "conferring the ministerial character," was granted by Mr. Wesley on the recommendation of the assistant (preacher in charge), "with or without consultation with the Quarterly Meeting, and sometimes without the knowledge of the person concerned." This method was occasionally followed by Bishop Asbury in America. But in process of time the work was confined to the Quarterly Conference acting on the recommendation of the class to which the applicant belonged, or the Leaders' Meeting. Under the law as it exists now, license is granted by the District Conference on the recommendation of the Quarterly Conference; though the

law of the Methodist Episcopal Church is slightly flexible, allowing, as it does, the license of preachers by the Quarterly Conferences in those districts in which the District Conference is not authorized, and makes local preachers amenable to the one or the other according to circumstances. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, local preachers are amenable only to the Quarterly Conference, which inquires annually "into the gifts, labors, and usefulness of each man," and is authorized to try and suspend or expel any local preacher who may be found guilty of crime. The Quarterly Conference is also the court of appeals for members of the Church expelled by their respective Societies.

The Quarterly Conference elects the stewards of the charge, the recording steward, and the district steward. It elects the trustees of Church property, including houses of worship, parsonages, and all other property owned by the charge. It also elects Sunday-school superintendents. In a word, it has supervision of the spiritual and temporal interests of the Church within the bounds of the charge.

#### THE DISTRICT CONFERENCE.

The District Conference in some form has

existed a long while. Among the Wesleyans it originated in 1791. It corresponds in some respects to the Annual Conference in America. "Inquiries are made regarding each minister and probationer, as to moral and religious character," official conduct, ability to preach, etc.; statistics are obtained, home mission work is considered, candidates for the ministry are examined. All this is done by the preachers. When the stewards join them, the funds of each circuit are brought under consideration. There is also a "financial district meeting" held every year. It had its beginning in 1819. "The finances of each circuit are arranged and determined for a year at that meeting."

In the Methodist Episcopal Church the District Conference is a legalized body with powers clearly defined, but it is left with the circuits and stations of a district to determine whether or not there shall be a District Conference. After a District Conference has been authorized, it "may be discontinued by a vote of a majority of the members present at any regular session, notice thereof having been given at a previous session, and with the concurrence of a majority of the Quarterly Conferences in the district." When organized, it

performs largely the work of the Quarterly Conference, especially that of licensing preachers, taking oversight and entire control of local preachers, even going so far as to make appointments for them which they are expected to fill.

In the Southern Church the District Conference dates its origin from the General Conference of 1870, and is as much a part of the machinery as any Conference of Methodism. For many years its powers were limited. They were mainly advisory, and the meeting valuable to the district principally on account of its social features and the opportunity it afforded for spiritual improvement. It transacted authoritatively only two or three items of business, chief of which was the election of lay delegates to the Annual Conference. In that election laymen and local preachers only are allowed to vote. After a few years, authority was given it to elect trustees for district property. At the General Conference of 1894 the work of licensing preachers, and recommending preachers to the Annual Conference for admission on trial into the traveling connection, and for readmission, and for election of local preachers to deacon's and elder's orders, was transferred from the

Quarterly to the District Conference. Local preachers are still amenable to the Quarterly Conference.

“The District Conference is composed of all the preachers in the district, traveling and local, including superannuated preachers (whether resident without or within the limits of the Annual Conferences to which they belong), and of laymen, the number of whom, and their mode of appointment, each Annual Conference determines for itself.” A bishop, or in his absence the presiding elder, presides; and if both be absent, the Conference elects a president. •

The District Conference has been of great benefit to the Church. It has called out and utilized intelligent and consecrated laymen, who otherwise would never have been known beyond the limits of the pastoral charge. They have helped spiritually, and have had much influence in stimulating the liberality of the Church.

#### THE CHURCH CONFERENCE.

The Church Conference is unknown to the Wesleyans of England, and to the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. The meeting nearest akin to it in England is the

“Leaders’ Meeting,” and in the Methodist Episcopal Church the “Leaders’ and Stewards’ Meeting,” though in both these official members only take part.

This Conference as it exists in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was authorized in 1866 under the title of “Church Meeting.” It was changed to Church Conference in 1870.

The Discipline says: “All the members of the Church, and resident members of the Annual Conference, shall come together once a month, or on circuits at least every three months, at every appointment, to hold a Church Conference, over which the preacher in charge shall preside. It may be held at any time most convenient for assembling the greatest number of members; but if on the Sabbath, it should not interfere with the morning public worship.”

It is the business of this Conference to see that a correct roll of the membership is kept. The duty is specially enjoined upon the secretary, who is required to keep a book and enter the names in chronological order, and to furnish the pastor with an alphabetical list. The roll is called at every meeting, unless otherwise ordered, and the Conference is authorized to strike off the names of any who, on ac-



count of removal or other cause, have been lost sight of for twelve months. Members whose names have been stricken off may be restored by vote of Conference if they appear and claim membership. The Conference is not a court of trial, nor of inquiry. It only purges the roll of members whose whereabouts are unknown.

In this Conference the preacher makes a report of his labors since the last meeting, as do the class leaders and stewards. Reports are also made from the Sunday schools and Epworth Leagues. Inquiry is made concerning the relief of the poor of the Church, and whether the Church is doing its duty for the cause of Missions, Church Extension, and other enterprises, and for the collections ordered by the Annual Conference. The stewards report to the meeting the whole amount to be raised by the charge, and that part of it which each congregation is expected to pay. The Church Conference may adopt its own method of raising the money. The Conference is not confined to routine work. It may originate work and devise plans for strengthening and building up the Church in the community. It may be made a great power for good.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### PASTORAL OVERSIGHT.

THE cause of Christ could not prosper without pastoral oversight. This necessarily involves rulership. Hence, those who are charged with pastoral care are also invested with authority—not to lord it over God's heritage, but to rule in the fear of God. The ministry, by virtue of divine call, and separation from the world, is best fitted for this business, and through all the ages has been recognized as the ruling force in the Church. However, it is not believed by all that the authority to rule is lodged exclusively in the hands of the ministry. Very many Christians of learning and piety are of opinion that the laity should share in the responsibility of directing the affairs of the Church. Protestants are well agreed on this point, though they differ somewhat as to the proper division of the work; some giving laymen a larger share in directing spiritual affairs than others, while some deny them spiritual or ministerial functions altogether. But these matters have ceased to be bones of contention among Christians.

The ministerial force of Episcopal Methodism is systematically arranged and distributed so as to secure pastoral care over every department of the Church. No apology is made for its system of government or methods of work. At the same time no claim is made of a "thus saith the Lord" for either, believing that no special form of government is divinely ordained, and that the Church is at liberty to adopt its own methods and to call its officers by any name it may deem proper. Accordingly Methodists have their bishops, presiding elders, preachers in charge, and local preachers.

#### BISHOPS AND THEIR DUTIES.

The origin and nature of the Methodist Episcopacy have already been set forth. Attention is directed in this connection to the duties of a bishop.

Dr. Coke, the first Methodist bishop, was ordained as a "general superintendent," the name having been chosen by Mr. Wesley evidently to guard against the idea of prelacy, which, as understood and practiced in the English Church, was distasteful both to Mr. Wesley and the Methodists. Still, the term superintendent and the duties implied are per-

fectly consistent with the New Testament teachings in respect to bishops, who are therein designated as overseers of the flock of Christ.

Methodist bishops are itinerant general superintendents, and perform such work as is directed by the General Conference in addition to those duties over which, by virtue of their authority as a coördinate branch of the government, they have exclusive control, namely, arranging the work and fixing the appointments of the preachers. This power cannot be taken from the Episcopacy by legislation of the General Conference. But the power constitutionally lodged in the hands of the bishops can be regulated. Hence there are directions concerning the arranging of the work and making the appointments of the preachers. The bishop presiding in an Annual Conference is compelled to give every properly accredited preacher an appointment.

In arranging the work and stationing the preachers the bishop acts on his own judgment. He alone is responsible. But, in order to reach just conclusions, he gathers information from all available sources, mainly from the presiding elders, who are thoroughly informed as to the state and needs of the

Church. These officers form the "Bishop's Cabinet," and they hold their consultations in private. The bishop "chooses the presiding elders, fixes their stations (appoints them to districts), and changes them when he judges it necessary." He also "changes, receives, and suspends in the intervals of the Conferences, as necessity may require, and as the Discipline directs."

The bishops preside in the General, Annual, and District Conferences. They decide all questions of law coming before them in the regular business of the Annual and District Conferences. Their several decisions are reviewed by the College of Bishops at their annual meeting, and are affirmed or reversed. When affirmed, their decisions become authoritative interpretations of law, and are published as such. The General Conference being the legislative body of the Church, no questions of law are submitted save in cases of appeal of a traveling preacher, which goes to the Committee on Appeals, made up "of one delegate from each Annual Conference." This committee is "sole judge of the law and the facts."

Another duty of the bishops is "to ordain bishops, elders, and deacons." Whether this

duty inheres in the Episcopacy, and is only subject to regulation by the General Conference, or whether it is merely a duty enjoined, and may be set aside by legislation, there may be difference of opinion. The former appears to be the view of Episcopal Methodism, as may be inferred from the law of the Church which requires the president of an Annual Conference elected "from among the traveling elders" in the absence of a bishop to "discharge all the duties of a bishop except ordination." This view accords with the action of Mr. Wesley, who, in his capacity as father and founder of Methodism, regarding himself as a scriptural bishop, ordained Dr. Coke a bishop, and authorized him to proceed to America and ordain Francis Asbury to the same office. Mr. Wesley followed precedent set by Paul and Barnabas, who, by virtue of authority vested in them, "ordained elders" in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch—in fact, "in every Church" they visited.

But this view is not to be so strictly maintained as to preclude ordination by any except bishops under all circumstances. Otherwise the Church might possibly be deprived of an ordained ministry altogether. The Church recognizes the law of expediency, and pro-

vides that "if, by death, expulsion, or otherwise, there be no bishop remaining," the General Conference shall elect one, and "the elders, or any three of them who shall be appointed by the General Conference for that purpose, shall ordain him according to our form of ordination."

#### PRESIDING ELDERS.

The presiding eldership is an essential feature of Methodist economy—none the less essential because it is peculiar. In the ordination of elders for America, Mr. Wesley probably never contemplated anything more than an order of men for the administration of the sacraments, and at the organization of the Church in 1784 only a number sufficient were ordained to this office to supply the demand. In the appointments of 1785 the names of several preachers "have the title *elder* affixed to them, and are prefixed to groups of circuits ranging from two to six in number, and including from one to nine preachers." This statement is from Dr. Tigert's "The Making of Methodism," where he further says: "Putting together the evidence derivable from the first and second annual Disciplines of the Church, from Thomas Ware and from Joshua

Soule, we are authorized to conclude that the presiding eldership, though not at first called by this name, is virtually coeval with the Church itself. . . . The first occurrence of the title 'presiding elder' in the official action of the Church is in the plan for the Council adopted by the Annual Conferences in 1789, three years after the official term 'district' had made its appearance in the Discipline of 1786."

Presiding elders are the representatives of the bishops—sub-bishops, to do the work of bishops in their absence. It is right and in accordance with the fitness of things that they should be chosen and appointed by the bishops. Indeed, it is necessary to the itinerant general superintendency of Methodism. Time and again the question of delegating the selection of presiding elders to the Annual Conference, making the office elective, has been agitated. The sentiment was so strong as to prevail in the General Conference of 1820, and would have become the law of the Church but for the decided stand of Bishop McKendree and Joshua Soule. The latter was elected to the Episcopacy at this Conference and the day appointed for his ordination. In the meantime the Conference enacted the offensive leg-



islation, whereupon Mr. Soule declined ordination, stating, in substance, to the Conference that the law making the presiding eldership elective was an infringement of the constitutional rights of the Episcopacy, and that as a bishop he could not be hampered in his administration by such legislation. Bishop McKendree joined with Soule in declaring the law a violation of the third Restrictive Rule. The Conference then by resolution suspended the operation of the law for the ensuing four years. The question, on the advice of Bishop McKendree, was referred to the Annual Conferences, which sustained the position of Bishop McKendree and Joshua Soule, and the next General Conference repealed the objectionable law. Joshua Soule was again elected bishop, and was ordained. Since then the sentiment in favor of an elective presiding eldership has not been strong enough to command a large following in either branch of Episcopal Methodism.

The presiding elder does the work that no other man can perform. Being the bishop's representative, he is at the same time the representative of the preachers and the people. He is the only man fully conversant with the affairs of the whole district over

which he presides. He knows the preachers—their fitness for any given station. He also knows the people—their peculiar needs, their ability, and their willingness. He is therefore in a position to advise the bishop, and thus help him to a proper understanding and judicious arrangement and supply of the charges. When the duties of the presiding elder are fully considered and performed, his competency as adviser will be readily acknowledged. These duties are thus set forth in the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. They are practically the same in the Methodist Episcopal Church:

To travel through his appointed district, in order to preach and to oversee the spiritual and temporal affairs of the Church.

In the absence of the bishop, to take charge of all the traveling and local preachers and exhorters in his district.

To change, receive, and suspend preachers in his district, during the intervals of the Conferences, and in the absence of the bishop, as the Discipline directs.

To be present, as far as practicable, at all the quarterly meetings, and to call together the members of the Quarterly Conference, over which he shall also preside.

To decide all questions of law which may come up in the regular business of the Quarterly or District Conference, when submitted to him in writing,

subject to an appeal to the president of the next Annual Conference.

To take care that every part of the Discipline be enforced in his district; to promote, by all proper means, the cause of Missions and Sunday schools, and the publication, at our own press, of tracts and Sunday-school books; to inquire carefully, at each Quarterly Conference, whether the rules respecting the instruction of children and the supplying of our books and periodicals have been faithfully observed; whether the preacher in charge administers the sacraments, holds Church Conferences, enforces moral discipline, and attends to the collections assessed in his charge; and to report to the Annual Conference the names of all the delinquent traveling preachers within his district.

To attend the bishops when present in his district, and to give them, when absent, all necessary information, by letter, of the state of his district.

To direct the candidates for the ministry to those studies recommended for them by the bishops.

To procure full statistics from every charge to be reported at the Annual Conference, . . . and to have the records of his District Conference at the Annual Conference for examination.

If any preacher absent himself from his circuit [charge], the presiding elder shall, as far as possible, fill his place with another preacher.

#### PREACHERS IN CHARGE.

Originally, preachers in charge were called "assistants," because they assisted Mr. Wesley, who had direct control of all the work,

which at the time was not very extensive. The title is still retained in the Discipline, notwithstanding the preacher is almost universally called “pastor,” a term that fully expresses his relation to the Church. Preachers in charge are closer to the people and more intimately identified with their interests than any other class of officers.

Preachers in charge compose the main body of the ministry, and on their energy and fidelity depend the success of the Church. The presiding elder is worth but little to any work if the preacher in charge is listless and indifferent, or if he is anywise disposed to be an obstructionist. A pastor out of harmony with his presiding elder or the great movements of the Church is a hindrance rather than a help to the people of his charge. Under conditions existing at present he has a larger share of work than formerly, and his responsibilities have been correspondingly increased. For information as to the duties of preachers in charge the reader is referred to the Discipline.

#### LOCAL PREACHERS.

The local ministry, like the presiding eldership, is peculiar to Methodism. This branch of the service is called local because those who

belong to it are not subject to appointment from year to year as those who give themselves to the itinerancy. They are really *lay* preachers. They were Mr. Wesley's first helpers, and exercised as preachers solely on his authority. When the itinerancy was inaugurated, all the lay preachers were not, or could not be, employed. Hence it came to pass that the two classes were distinguished, one as traveling and the other as local preachers. The distinction remains to this day.

Every Methodist preacher begins his career in the local ranks. None are licensed as traveling preachers. While no man is obliged to enter the itinerancy, it is from the local ranks that the traveling ministry is recruited. To this end, a local preacher on his own application is recommended to the Annual Conference for admission on trial, and retains the status of a local preacher until the end of his probation, two years, when, all conditions having been fulfilled, he is received into full connection.

To faithful local preachers, Philip Embury in New York, and Robert Strawbridge in Maryland, America is indebted for the planting of Methodism in her soil. The Church has never lacked men of this class, who, though

not feeling called to travel at large, nevertheless have "a dispensation of the gospel committed unto them," and exercise their ministry in a narrower sphere. Many local preachers are men of exalted piety and great ability.

Consecrated men in this arm of the service have been of immense advantage to the Church, not only in assisting the pastors in their work, but in always being ready to take the place of pastors in an emergency or when the supply of traveling preachers is not equal to the demands of the work. They are often called on to serve as pastors, and many of them do acceptable and efficient labor.

Faithful local preachers are intrusted with the orders of the ministry. Having passed their novitiate, and stood an approved examination on the course of study prescribed (a recent requirement), and receiving a recommendation to the Annual Conference, they may be ordained deacon; and following the same course, four years later may be ordained to the eldership.

Local preachers in the Methodist Episcopal Church are amenable to the District Conference; or if no District Conference is organized in the district with which they are connected, they are amenable to their respective Quarter-

ly Conferences. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, they are amenable to the Quarterly Conference. In both Churches they may appeal to the Annual Conference in case of conviction for crime.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### LAY OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH—STEWARDS.

THE office of steward in Methodism is so well known as to need but little space in these pages. Young readers, and some old ones, may be interested in learning something of its origin; for, though in the beginning it was of small import, it has come to be the most important and responsible office among the laymen of the Church. "The office," says Stevens, "arose, like most others in the economy of Methodism, from what would be called an accidental cause. The persons who persuaded Wesley to open the Foundry for worship proposed to contribute to his support; he declined their offer, for his college fellowship afforded him all the income he needed. They insisted on giving some financial aid to the new Church. 'Then I asked,' he writes, 'Who will take the trouble of receiving this money and paying it where it is needful?' One said, 'I will do it, and keep the account for you'; so here was the first steward. Afterwards I desired one or two more to help me as stewards, and in process of time a greater number.'" From that day to



this the office has been utilized by universal Methodism.

An officer so important needed to be clearly described, and his duties defined. Hence it was required that a man fit for the place should be "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," that in all his work he might be acceptable to God. The qualifications for a steward are practically the same in all the leading branches of Methodism, and may be stated in the language of the Discipline: "Let the stewards be men of solid piety, who both know and love the Methodist doctrine and discipline, and of good natural and acquired abilities to transact the temporal business of the Church." Regulations vary with various bodies, but the general duties are the same, that is, to look after the support of the ministry. In addition, as Bishop McTyeire in his "Manual of the Discipline" says: "As class leaders have, incidentally, a financial function, so stewards have a spiritual one. It is their duty to inform the pastor of any who walk disorderly, and to tell the preachers what they think wrong in them."

There is no uniformity among the different orders of Methodists as to the number of stewards allowed for each charge, some allowing more and others less. The law of the

Methodist Episcopal Church is, "not less than three nor more than thirteen." In the Southern Church it is "one steward for every thirty members" of a pastoral charge, "provided, . . . each Society in a circuit may have one steward, and each circuit or station may have at least seven."

From among the stewards — the "local board" — the Quarterly Conference appoints one a recording and one a district steward. The Discipline of each Church specifically defines the duties of each class of stewards. (See Discipline.)

If the reader will carefully study those sections of the Discipline which treat of stewards, it will be seen that the strong language of Bishop McTyeire is fully justified:

A careless or inefficient steward may, without positive opposition, starve out the ministry, in the midst of plenty and a willing people; for no other member feels at liberty to act in his place, without appointment. He stands between the pastor and his support. He is the commissary of the Church militant, and by his non-action can contribute more to defeat than all the strategy of the enemy. On the contrary, where energetic and liberal stewards are employed, the Church partakes of their spirit, the congregation devises liberal things, poverty vies with wealth, and comparatively small and feeble Societies amply sustain the institutions of the Church.

## THE CLASS LEADER.

Christians are largely dependent on the social meetings of the Church for the maintenance and development of the spiritual life. The "communion of saints," as Mr. William Arthur has said, "is a vital part of New Testament Christianity." Mr. Wesley recognized this truth at the very beginning of his public career, and provided special appointments for such communion, though it was not until 1742 that the office of class leader was introduced; and when introduced it was not for the purpose of using the leader as a sub-pastor, into which he soon developed. The leader as an adviser in spiritual matters was an afterthought, and providential.

The origin of class meetings which necessitated class leaders, was on this wise: Mr. Wesley was in conversation with members of the Society at Bristol concerning the means of paying the chapel debts. One member proposed that every member "give a penny a week until all are paid." Another member answered, "But many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it." "Then," answered the first, "put eleven of the poorest with me, and, if they can give anything, well; I will call on them weekly, and if they can give

nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself." The proposition was accepted, and the Society was divided into classes.

This, it will be observed, was only an arrangement for managing the local finances. In the course of their rounds some of these leaders found members "who did not live as they should," and so informed Mr. Wesley. Immediately that sagacious man saw what he had been long wanting, leaders among the laity who could exercise a kind of spiritual oversight of the flock in the absence of the preacher. In this manner, says Stevens, "originated one of the most distinctive features" of Methodism. It may be truly said that class leaders and class meetings are peculiar to Methodism.

What was accomplished at Bristol was soon effected at London, and in due course of time the class meeting was recognized as an institution throughout the Societies. "It is the best school of experimental divinity the world has seen in modern times." Millions of souls living, and as many more in heaven, will bless God for the oversight of a faithful brother, who under all circumstances was concerned for the welfare of their souls.

The pastor appoints the class leader. This

is right, since he is the pastor's assistant. For information as to the duties in full of the class leader, see Discipline.

#### EXHORTERS.

Early in the history of Methodism, and up to a recent period, the exhorter was a popular and useful officer of the Church. The office is still recognized, and is filled by good men with great profit; but those called to the office are not so numerous as formerly. Occasionally a man is met who uses his gifts in this capacity with telling effect. The passing of the exhorter is to be deplored, if for no other reason because many gifted and successful exhorters are spoiled by giving them authority to preach.

The exhorter is not technically a preacher; he is not set apart for a preacher, though, like John the Baptist, he preaches many things in his exhortations. His business is to enforce the commands of the gospel, and call sinners to repentance. To this line of public service he is restricted by the very title of his office. True, this is preaching, but it embraces only a part of a preacher's business. The latter is clothed with full authority, the former exercises in a narrower sphere.

The authority to exhort has been often con-

ferred as a measure of caution—an antechamber, so to speak, in which men who professed to have a call to preach were tested. In this respect it has been useful, for it has demonstrated the unfitness of many for the office of the ministry—a fact that not a few are unwilling to acknowledge.

Every leading Methodist body requires exhorters to be licensed. “As early as 1780 it was a solemn Conference deliverance that ‘no one presume to speak in public’ without a written license from the pastor, subject to renewal by him, after ‘examination with respect to life, qualification, and reception.’” In 1816 the law was so changed in the Methodist Episcopal Church as to require persons desiring license to exhort to obtain a recommendation from the class, or leaders’ and stewards’ meeting, and to have the license signed by the preacher in charge. It also subjected exhorters to annual examination of character by the Quarterly Conference, and renewal of license signed by the presiding elder or preacher in charge, if the Quarterly Conference approve. The law is the same to-day, save that they are subject to examination and approval by the District or Quarterly Conference.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South,

gives the following directions concerning the licensing of persons to exhort: "The Quarterly Conference shall have authority to license proper persons to exhort, and to renew their licenses annually, when, in its judgment, their gifts, grace, and usefulness will warrant it. No person shall be licensed to exhort without the recommendation of the church of which he is a member, or of the leaders' meeting of the charge to which he belongs; nor shall any license be valid unless signed by the president of the Conference." Exhorters, by virtue of their office, are members of the Quarterly Conference.

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TRUSTEES.

With the erection of houses of worship, and the possession of other Church property, came the necessity for trustees. This in turn made regulations for the office necessary. Their duties in general are sufficiently indicated by the title of their office. They do not own Church property; they simply hold it in trust for the use of the Church, and have no control over it otherwise than the law directs. The Church determines to what uses its property shall be put. The trustees are required to see that it is "used, kept, maintained, and

disposed of” for the purposes to which it has been dedicated.

The regulations concerning trustees are well-nigh the same in the leading Methodist bodies, which regulations apply uniformly, except in states where the civil statutes conflict with the laws of the Church. In such cases, the Church conforms to the law of the state. As a rule trustees are elected by the Quarterly Conference, and are responsible to that body, and are required to make a written report of their work once a year. In the case of district property, the District Conference appoints the trustees.

#### SUNDAY-SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS.

Sunday-school superintendents are the best known lay officers of the Church. They are familiar, both in person and office, to all, from the oldest to the youngest member of the congregation. Their duties are so well understood that no word of explanation here is necessary. Suffice it to say, next to a faithful pastor, a faithful, godly, and zealous Sunday-school superintendent has more to do in shaping the religious life, and in holding the children true to the Church, than any other



officer. His position is one of no little responsibility.

Unfortunately, the name of the first Sunday-school superintendent is not recorded. The honor is generally accorded to Robert Raikes, of England, who began a Sunday school in 1781 at the suggestion of a young woman who afterwards married a Methodist preacher. But twelve years before that time (1769), Hannah Ball, a Methodist young woman, established a Sunday school and instructed many children in the truths of the Bible. Stevens says, "Doubtless many similar attempts were made before that time." With no further light on the subject, and accepting Stevens's History as true, the honor of superintending the first Sunday school must go to Hannah Ball, of Wycombe, England.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE WORK OF METHODISM—MISSIONS.

METHODISM from its incipency has been dominated by the missionary spirit. Wesley was nothing if not a missionary. His convictions on the subject led him first to America "to convert the Indians." His work in that direction was a comparative failure, and he returned to England and began the work of spreading scriptural holiness, in which his success was little less than marvelous. The achievements of his followers have challenged the admiration of the religious world.

Mr. Wesley's missionary operations were conducted principally in countries belonging to the British crown. But much of his work was none the less foreign in its character. It was in his day as great an undertaking, and involved as much self-sacrifice, to go from England to America as it does in this day to go from America to China. Then, as now, men fired with missionary zeal were ready to go to the ends of the earth to carry the gospel. As an active promoter of missions, Dr. Thomas Coke stands almost, if not quite, un-

rivaled in modern times. In the prosecution of his plans he crossed the Atlantic eighteen times, including several voyages to America as general superintendent of the Church. By way of eminence he was called the "foreign minister" of Methodism. He founded the negro missions of the West Indies, which at the time of his death numbered seventeen thousand members. He "spent almost the whole of his patrimonial fortune," which was large, in visiting and sustaining his missions. "He preached for them and begged for them from door to door. . . . When a veteran of almost seventy years, he presented himself before the Wesleyan Conference as a missionary for the East Indies. The Conference objected on account of the expense, but Coke offered to pay the charges of the outfit himself to the amount of \$30,000, and so prevailed over all objections, and embarked with a small band of laborers. He died on the voyage in 1814, and was buried in the sea; but the undertaking succeeded, and the Wesleyan East India Missions are the result." (McClintock and Strong.)

The missionary spirit pervaded the Christmas Conference. Stevens in his History says there was a "call from Nova Scotia," in com-

pliance with which "Freeborn Garrettson and James O. Cromwell were ordained elders for that province. Jeremiah Lambert was ordained to the same office for Antigua, in the West Indies. Work was begun in Canada a short time before it was extended to Nova Scotia, and a few years later into New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland.

The Christmas Conference lasted ten days. "Coke preached every day at noon." Alluding to his work on the occasion, he says: "On one of the week days, at noon, I made a collection toward assisting our brethren who are going to Nova Scotia; and our friends generously contributed fifty pounds currency—thirty pounds sterling." The missionary spirit then manifested has never died out among the Methodists.

Notwithstanding the missionary zeal of the early preachers and the rapid extension of the Church, it was not until 1819 that anything like a formal organization for the promotion of mission work was effected. This was done in New York under a constitution drawn up by Dr. Nathan Bangs. Bishop McKendree was elected President; Bishops George and Roberts and Nathan Bangs, Vice Presidents; Thomas

Mason, Corresponding Secretary; and Joshua Soule, Treasurer. There were thirty-two managers. Drs. Mason and Soule served one year, when Dr. Bangs was elected Secretary and Treasurer, and served sixteen years. The General Conference of 1820 sanctioned the scheme, and the Missionary Society began a career of usefulness that has not retrograded through all the years.

The operations of the Society for twelve years were confined to the limits of North America, with special reference to the Indians. In this connection it is but just to say that the first American missionary was John Stewart, an African, who went from Marietta, Ohio, to the wild Indians in 1815 or 1816. He was remarkably successful. The first woman missionary was the heroic Harriet Stubbs, of excellent family and highly connected. The Indians "looked upon her as an angel messenger sent from the spirit land to teach them the way to heaven." The success of the work among the Indians made organized effort in behalf of missions a necessity.

In 1832 the Missionary Society proposed, with the consent of the General Conference, to establish a mission in Africa. Melville B. Cox, a native of Maine, but at the time stationed in

Raleigh, North Carolina, a reserve delegate to the General Conference, volunteered his service and was accepted. He reached Liberia in March, 1833, and immediately began work. A few Methodists, transported to Africa by the Colonization Society, were found and organized into a Church. Three missions were planned, also an academy. The consecrated missionary did not live long enough to see any of his plans mature. Fever seized him, and he died within five months. His dying cry was, "Let a thousand fall before Africa be given up!" In 1835 Rev. Fountain E. Pitts, of the Tennessee Conference, was sent to South America on a missionary exploration tour. He was absent one year, and as a result of his report Rev. Justin Spaulding was sent to Brazil, but, in consequence of Romish intolerance, his mission was a failure. It was not until long years afterwards that Methodism got a foothold in that great empire. To-day the work flourishes. Methodist missions are world-wide. There are stations in Africa, South America, China, Japan, Korea, India, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Bulgaria, Italy, and Mexico. These countries have been occupied for years. Very recently missionaries have been sent to Porto

Rico and the Philippine Isles, countries heretofore under the dominion of the Roman Catholic Church. Prior to the war with Spain (in 1898), feeble efforts were made to establish missions in Cuba. Since the close of that struggle, vigorous efforts have been put forth, and mission work flourishes on that island.

To the credit of the Methodists be it said, they never overlooked the spiritual interests of the colored people. Mr. Wesley paid attention to them. His first convert among them was an African slave woman, belonging to a rich West India planter. This was the first African in the world converted to the Protestant religion. It occurred in 1758, and was the means of planting Methodism in the West Indies. At the time of Mr. Whitefield's first visit to Georgia slavery had not been introduced into the colony. It was introduced in 1740. During subsequent visits to the colony, Whitefield frequently preached to the negroes in connection with the whites. The results were sometimes very happy. On his seventh and last visit, as learned from Smith's "*History of Methodism in Georgia*," he "brought with him a young man, Cornelius Winter by name, who became the first missionary to the negroes."

“At the Conference of 1787,” three years only after the organization of the Church, “the first decisive step toward the evangelization of the slaves was taken.” The preachers were required “to leave nothing undone” for their spiritual benefit and salvation. These injunctions were faithfully followed, and the result was gratifying. During the same year the Cumberland Street Church, in Charleston, South Carolina, “was finished with galleries for the negroes.” This was the beginning of a custom throughout the South wherever there was a congregation of colored people.

William Capers was the great apostle to the negroes, the father of missions to the slaves of the South. He came into the South Carolina Conference in 1808. His first work was the Wateree Circuit, a charge of twenty-four appointments to be filled in four weeks. To make one round required a ride of three hundred miles. There were four hundred and ninety-eight white and a hundred and twenty-four colored members. The young preacher paid as much attention to the latter as to the former, and doubtless acquired on this work that solicitude for the salvation of the blacks that characterized his after life, and whose efforts culminated in missions to the negroes



throughout the whole of the Southern country. The author entered the ministry in 1859. His first circuit, like hundreds of others, embraced the "colored mission." He preached to more negroes than white people. His second circuit was mostly in the hills, where negroes were few. Only at two or three points were there congregations of colored people. On his third charge there were perhaps five negroes to one white person. Often during spring and summer did he preach to four congregations on Sunday, one white and three colored. This was in 1862. With the close of that year closed the work technically known in the South as "colored missions." War had deranged the work. To carry it on as of old was impracticable, if not impossible. It was equally impracticable to resume it after the war closed.

But who can measure the good results of the labors of Methodist preachers among the colored people of the South? Cold statistics give but a feeble idea of the work. They give no hint of the sacrifices, of the privations and reproaches endured, of the vast amount of toil necessary to the accomplishment of such results as the figures indicate. At the beginning of systematic efforts to save the

negroes there were in connection with the Societies three thousand eight hundred and ninety-three colored members. At the close of the year 1829 there were sixty-two thousand eight hundred and fourteen. At the close of 1860, when the war cloud arose, there were in the Southern Church alone two hundred and seven thousand slaves enrolled as members. To-day the colored members of the various Methodist bodies, not including the number in the Methodist Episcopal Church, number, lay and clerical, one million four hundred and nine thousand one hundred and sixty-four.

The missionary operations of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for home and foreign work, are conducted by one General Board. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the General Board has charge only of the foreign work. The home work is under the direction of Annual Conference Boards, each Conference managing its own affairs. The women of both Churches have their separate organizations for home and foreign work. The colored Churches also have their missionary societies, with representatives in the foreign field, and are doing good work.

The income of the Missionary Society for

the first year of its existence amounted to only \$823.04. For the fiscal year of 1899 the income of the Societies of the Methodist Episcopal Church, including the Women's Societies, was \$1,923,998. For the same year the income of all the Societies in the Southern Church was \$543,554.35—or nearly two MILLIONS AND A HALF of dollars in one year from only about half the Methodists of the world. In *per capita* contributions to missions the Wesleyans of England lead the Methodist hosts.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WORK OF METHODISM—EDUCATION.

METHODISM was born in a university. Its founder and those who coöperated with him in the beginning were not only men of literary attainments, but the friends and promoters of education. This is particularly true of Mr. Wesley, who was one of the foremost scholars of the day, and spared no pains to instill a love of learning into his preachers and people. He was handicapped in his efforts for lack of means. He was not rich, and his followers generally were poor. But he never lost sight of the subject. "It is an interesting fact," says Stevens in his History, "that in the year which is recognized as the epoch of Methodism, the date of its first field preaching, and among the miserable people where the latter began, it also begun the first of its literary institutions. And if anything could enhance the interest of this fact, it is that the founders of both Methodistic parties, Calvinistic and Arminian, shared in the founding of the first Methodist seminary. Whitefield laid the corner stone of the Kingswood School; and kneeling upon the ground, surrounded by reclaimed

and weeping colliers, prayed that 'the gates of hell' might not prevail against it; while the prostrate multitude, now awakened to a new intellectual as well as moral life, responded with hearty amens. Wesley reared it by funds which he reserved from the income of his college fellowship or received from his followers. It was the germ of the later institution which bears its name." The Kingswood School still exists, and is one of the flourishing institutions of the Wesleyan Methodists.

In 1744, the year in which the first Conference was held, Mr. Wesley "proposed a theological school, 'a seminary for laborers' or 'lay preachers,' as it was characterized." (Stevens.) This project, says the historian, "was at last realized by the present two 'theological institutions' of English Methodism."

As early as 1780, four years in advance of the organization of the Church in America, John Dickins, the first book publisher of the American Methodists, suggested to Mr. Asbury "the plan of a Methodist academic institution." Mr. Asbury heartily approved the plan, though the Societies were hardly able to put it in operation. But the project was not abandoned, and at the first meeting of Dr. Coke with Mr. Asbury the latter submitted

the matter to the bishop, who heartily approved it. The Christmas Conference indorsed the movement, and by vote determined immediately upon the erection of a collegiate building. Money to the amount of nearly five thousand dollars was quickly raised, and Dr. Coke, as soon as convenient, contracted for the building material. The corner stone was laid by Mr. Asbury on Sunday, June 5, 1785. The school was called Cokesbury College, and was located at Abingdon, Maryland, about twenty-five miles from Baltimore. The school was opened in 1787. Many good people were attracted to Abingdon. The school was destroyed by fire in 1795; "but a second edifice was soon after provided in Baltimore," which "in one year shared the fate of its predecessor." This put an end to the Cokesbury College, but not to the efforts of the Methodists in behalf of Christian education.

In 1789 or 1790 a college was projected for Georgia, and the "principal friends" agreed to endow it with "two thousand acres of good land." This college the Georgia Methodists agreed to call "Wesley College," in honor of Mr. Wesley, if he should permit. About the same time a school was projected by Mr. Asbury in Kentucky, and three hundred pounds

in land and money were given for its establishment. The school was called Bethel. It did not succeed. The efforts of the Methodists were in advance of the demands and the ability of the people, but they served to show that the Church was interested in the education of its children.

But Methodism was destined to take rank with the foremost in the number, quality, and strength of its institutions of learning. In the United States the Methodist Episcopal Church takes the lead, having in 1898—the latest figures at hand—two hundred and twenty-five schools of all grades at home and abroad; value, grounds and buildings, \$16,853,639; total amount of endowment, \$14,543,489; productive endowment, \$9,908,325; professors and teachers, 3,097; students, 46,408. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, has, including eight or ten schools “under the patronage of the Church,” 127 schools; 913 teachers; 14,323 scholars; grounds and buildings valued at \$4,046,550; total endowment, \$2,409,080; productive endowment, \$2,150,080. The educational statistics of the several minor divisions of Methodism are not at hand.

## SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

The first Sunday school of Methodism, if not of the world, was organized at High Wycombe, England, by Hannah Ball, an ardent young Methodist, in the year 1769. This was fourteen years before Robert Raikes began his famous school at Gloucester, which school had its origin in the mind of another young Methodist woman, Sophia Cooke, who became the wife of Samuel Bradburn, a Methodist preacher. She first "suggested to Raikes the Sunday-school idea, and actually marched with him at the head of his troop of ragged urchins the first Sunday they were taken to the parish church." (Tyerman's Life of Wesley.)

Raikes was the editor of the *Gloucester Journal*, but for two years he made no mention of his Sunday school. This perhaps was because he regarded his "plan" as an experiment. He referred to it in his paper on November 3, 1783, and some time in 1784 he published an account of it. It immediately attracted the attention of Mr. Wesley, who reprinted the article in the *Arminian Magazine*; and "exhorted his people to adopt the new institution." They took his advice. The same year Mr. John Fletcher heard of the



Sunday school, and, ever ready to adopt any measure that would help develop the spiritual nature of his flock, "set about the work." "He soon had three hundred children under instruction, and diligently trained them till his last illness."

Mr. Wesley spoke of Sunday schools "prophetically." In his Journal for July 18, 1784, he wrote: "I find these schools springing up wherever I go; perhaps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of; who knows but some of these schools may be nurseries for Christians?" To-day Sunday schools are almost universally regarded as essential, the principal nurseries of the Church.

The first Sunday school in the United States was established by Bishop Asbury in 1786 "at the home of Thomas Crenshaw, in Hanover county, Virginia. . . . In 1790 the first recognition of Sunday schools by an American Church was made by the vote of the Methodist Conferences, ordering their formation throughout the Church, and also the compilation of a book for them." (Stevens's History.) In 1827 the Sunday-school Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized. Like the original Missionary Society,

it was destined to become one of the strongest arms of the Church. It is to-day of colossal proportions, numerically, financially, and spiritually. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, considering its ability and numbers, is not one whit behind its sister Church in prosecuting its work for the salvation of the children. Its business is conducted by a Board of five, elected by the General Conference. The Sunday-school editor is chairman of the Board.

In connection with the history of Sunday schools in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Dr. Abel Stevens gave the statistics for 1866 as follows: Schools, 13,400; teachers and officers, more than 150,000; and near 918,000 scholars. The Yearbook gives the figures for 1898: Schools, 31,686; officers and teachers, 350,388; scholars, 2,679,246. These figures do not include schools in foreign lands. The statistics for the Church, South, for the year ending April 30, 1900, are as follows: Schools, 13,940; teachers and officers, 102,723; scholars, 849,101.

Both branches of the Church print and circulate an immense amount of literature, including libraries, periodicals, and lesson helps adapted to all ages and all grades. The Church

South publishes nine Sunday-school periodicals (including picture cards sold only in sets) with a combined circulation of 1,131,800. The Yearbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church gives the names of its periodicals, eleven in number, but not the aggregate of circulation. Other branches of Methodism are successfully engaged in Sunday-school work, but no statistics of recent date are at hand. What the two leading branches are doing indicates the spirit that animates the whole body.

#### CHURCH EXTENSION.

Thousands of practically-minded Methodists recognized the building of houses of worship as necessary to the permanent occupation of any locality, town or country, long before any organized effort was made by the Church to give aid or stimulate local energy in that direction. Hundreds of Societies, organized at the close of revival meetings under bush arbors or in public schoolhouses or "Union churches," after a few years of sickly existence passed away, or were absorbed by other denominations, simply for lack of a dwelling place.

Churches, like families, cannot live and thrive in hired houses or temporary shelters. It is not sufficient that a man and wife have a

place to stay, to eat and sleep; their life purpose cannot be accomplished without a home. There must be some place around which to cluster their affections. They cannot love a boarding house, nor can home love be there developed in their children. To them all boarding houses look alike. Nor can love for the Church and its institutions be developed and maintained without a building, an altar all its own. Where love is lacking, there can be no loyalty.

The Church was long finding out these facts, and longer still in making efforts to stop the leakage that was a more or less drain on her membership from year to year. Now that Church Extension Societies exist, conducted with energy and ability, and on business principles, the evil is being cured. The desire to build a house is stimulated and put into execution in almost every Society, however poor, by assurances that what is lacking on the part of the Society will be furnished by the Church Extension Board. And, what is better, observation shows that the interest thus aroused is permanent, and results in enlarged liberality toward all the benevolences of the Church.

The "Church Extension Society" of the Methodist Episcopal Church, now incorpo-

rated under the name of "The Board of Church Extension of the Methodist Episcopal Church," was ordered by the General Conference at Philadelphia in 1864. In January, 1865, the first Board of Managers was appointed, and the following June Dr. S. Y. Monroe was elected Secretary. He died in February, 1867, and was succeeded by Dr. A. J. Kynett, who filled the office continuously for nearly thirty-two years.

According to the Methodist Yearbook for 1900, the following is the work accomplished by the Society from its beginning to October 31, 1899: "Aggregate receipts on the General Fund, sustained chiefly by collections, and available for donations to churches, \$4,201,205.97; on the Loan Fund, sustained chiefly by personal gifts, absolute, subject to life annuity, and bequests, giving a capital of \$1,086,856.54; loans returned, \$1,270,367.73. Total Loan Fund, \$2,357,224.27. Total amount used, \$6,558,430.24. Total number of churches aided by donations and loans, not including known duplications, 11,301."

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, at its session in 1882, organized a Board of Church Extension exactly similar in character and purpose to the

Board of its sister Church. The office was located in Louisville, Ky., and continues there. Dr. David Morton was elected Secretary, and held the position until his death in March, 1898. He was succeeded by Dr. P. H. Whisner, of the Baltimore Conference, who, now (1900) holds the position. This Church, as does also the Methodist Episcopal Church, provides for an Auxiliary Church Extension Board in each Annual Conference, and for City Boards; the one in "cities having three or more pastoral charges," the other "in large cities." Both Churches require local Boards to sustain their work by special collections. No interference with the collections and operations of the General and Conference Boards is allowed. In both Churches the regulations and methods of work are practically the same.

The Church Extension work grows more and more in the confidence and affections of the people and preachers of the Church South. The first year of its history the collections amounted to \$32,833.98. For the year 1899 the collections amounted to \$65,390.71. The collections and special donations since the organization of the Board amount to \$850,390.71. In addition there has been given and bequeathed for the permanent loan fund \$155,000, and

legacies yet to be paid, \$20,000; or a total of \$1,025,390.71. These funds have been used to aid in the building of churches in all parts of the connection. The churches helped number 3,900. The two Methodisms have assisted in building over 15,000 houses of worship. Other Methodist bodies are engaged in the same form of benevolence.

#### THE EPWORTH LEAGUE.

The Epworth League is the latest organized effort in the Church. It was intended primarily for the young people. For that reason, many prophesied that great good would result. For the same reason, others said it would fail. But, in the language of the Methodist Yearbook, "the days of mere prophecy are past. Its ranks, well drilled, and fired with holy enthusiasm, are marching steadily in the van of the great Christian army, as it so soon enters the twentieth century."

The purpose for which the League is organized is well stated in the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, namely: "For the promotion of piety, and loyalty to our Church among the young people; their education in the Bible and Christian literature,

and in the missionary work of the Church; and their encouragement in works of grace and charity.”

The history of the organization in the Methodist Episcopal Church may be briefly stated as follows: “Previous to 1889 various organizations for young people were formed in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and were recognized or indorsed by their respective Conferences. In May, 1889, the representatives of five of the largest of these societies met in Cleveland, Ohio, for conference and consolidation, and on the 15th effected a union. . . . It was soon indorsed by the General Conference, and thus became the official young people’s society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Chapters now exist not only throughout the whole extent of the United States, but also in every land where the Methodist Episcopal Church has planted its mission stations. . . . The enrollment now (1900) reaches 19,800 Epworth and 6,900 Junior Leagues, with a total membership of 1,860,000.” (Methodist Yearbook.) That is a wonderful showing for eleven years of work.

Up to the General Conference of 1900 the League work was under the management of a Board of Control, with a Secretary whose



business it was to travel at large and promote the cause. The Board of Control remains, but the office of General Secretary has been abolished, and the duties of the office transferred to the editor of the *Epworth Herald*, the organ of the League—a weekly paper, ably edited by Dr. Joseph F. Berry, with a circulation larger than that of any young people's paper in the United States, excepting the *Youth's Companion*.

In regard to the League movement in the Southern Church, the Epworth League Handbook, prepared by Dr. H. M. Du Bose, says:

In the same year [1889, when the League in the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized] a number of societies previously existing in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, were organized into a co-operative union with a distinct constitution and plan of work. This movement had its beginning in Trinity Church, in the city of Los Angeles, Cal., in 1889, when the pastor and the young people of his congregation reorganized their society, already several years in existence, into more effective shape, moved to do so by the great demands of the work of that Western pastorate. Their model was the early Methodist Society, and that they carefully sought to follow. This was the real and historical beginning of the Epworth League in our Church, the life-seed out of which it has sprung and grown. Many of those young Trinity Church workers had never been

in any other young people's society than their own, but their organization anticipated the essential features of the Epworth League as it exists in the Southern Church to-day. It became the model of many other societies organized throughout the Union, chiefly in California and the West. Other societies with similar designs existed elsewhere in the Church. In 1890 the Church Conference of Trinity Church submitted to the General Conference a memorial and a plan of organization, together with a constitution, and prayed for their adoption for the whole Church. These documents are among the records of the Publishing House at Nashville. On this memorial the General Conference authorized the formation of Leagues, and they were at first placed under control of the Sunday-school Board. To Dr. W. G. E. Cunningham, then Sunday-school Secretary, is due the honor of setting this infant movement on its feet.

In 1894 the General Conference took a forward step in Epworth matters, and erected the League into a separate connectional department, elected an Epworth League Board of Control and a General Secretary and Editor, and ordered the publication of a weekly League paper. Rev. S. A. Steel, D.D., was elected Secretary and Editor. Dr. Steel served four years, and was succeeded by Dr. H. M. Du Bose.

The latest official figures show 4,787 chartered Senior chapters, with a membership of 215,415; and 560 chartered Junior chapters, with 19,600 members; making a total chartered membership of 235,015. But careful estimates indicate that there are 1,000 unchar-

tered Senior chapters, and a number of unreported Junior chapters, with an estimated membership of 50,000, which would run the grand total to 285,015.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### DIVISIONS OF METHODISM.

THERE are about twenty-five organized bodies of people called Methodists; seventeen in the United States, and eight in Europe. There may be other bodies called by the same name; but if so, the gatherers of Church statistics fail to mention them. Many good people are of opinion that all Church divisions are wrong; that there are so many Methodist Churches they regard as hurtful to the cause of Christianity in general, and to Methodism in particular. It does not so appear to these Methodists; each body can give reasons for its separate existence, and while these reasons may not be satisfactory to the world, no one is justified in calling in question the piety and integrity of those who separate from the parent body and organize a Society in accordance with their convictions.

Nearly, if not quite, every division of Methodism was the result of differences in the matter of polity or practice, and not of doctrine. Of course the separation of Wesley and Whitefield in 1741, which resulted in the Calvinistic Methodists, is to be excepted. But this oc-

curred before Methodism was fairly established.<sup>1</sup> This organization, after the death of Mr. Whitefield (in 1770), was divided into three separate sects. The first was known as Lady Huntingdon's Connection; the second was called the Tabernacle Connection, or Whitefield Methodists; and the third of these sects is the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists. This last body flourishes mostly in the principality of Wales. Besides these, other minor divisions exist in Europe, of which no mention can here be made. Attention must be confined to the principal divisions.

#### THE WESLEYAN METHODISTS.

Wesleyans is a general name given to all the followers of John Wesley throughout the world. Preëminently and of right it belongs to the "main and original body of the Methodists in Great Britain," who call themselves Wesleyan Methodists. The origin of the body has been already given in these pages. In order to maintain oneness in doctrine and uni-

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<sup>1</sup>The historian of the Wesleyans in McClintock and Strong's Cyclopædia says: "In 1742 Mr. Wesley and John Nelson itinerated through parts of Yorkshire and Cornwall, establishing Methodism in many places. During that year the organization of Methodism was nearly completed."

formity in practice, and hold the property of the Methodists, Mr. Wesley drew up the Deed of Declaration (already noticed), and had it recorded in the proper court. In other words, the Society was incorporated, and the management placed in the hands of one hundred preachers, known as the Legal Hundred. The provisions of the Deed of Declaration remain intact to the present day. It must not be understood, however, that the instrument, as binding in its provisions as it was, left no room for the adoption of new plans, or for the adaptation of Methodism to demands as they might arise. That would have been contrary to the policy of Mr. Wesley, who never hesitated to adopt any plan or use any means that would advance the cause of Christ. The Wesleys, pursuing the same policy, have in all respects kept pace with the age, and are to-day as aggressive as any body of Methodists in the world.

The Legal Hundred is still the governing power, but the whole body of the itinerant ministry, together with laymen, meet in Conference, and exercise no little influence in shaping opinions and in determining the final action of the legal Conference. Had none but the Legal Hundred ever been allowed to

influence legislation, the original Wesleyan Church in all probability would long since have been wrecked. At one time it was very near the verge of ruin—the body losing about one hundred and twenty thousand members within two or three years; the troubles which occasioned the loss, and the organization of the Wesleyan Reformers, being attributed to the arbitrary conduct of the leading preachers. The Wesleyans were twenty-five years regaining their lost ground.

The Wesleyans are to-day the strongest and most aggressive body of Methodists in the old world. They give more money *per capita* to missions than any body of Methodists in the world, and they are fully abreast of other Churches in the matter of education, sacred and secular, and also in church building and mission work in London. The statistics for 1899, including both home and foreign work, are as follows: Churches, 11,422; ministers, 3,101; lay preachers, 25,282; members, 696,117; Sunday schools, 9,517; officers and teachers, 143,659; Sunday-school scholars, 1,129,584.

#### THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

The planting of Methodism in America has

been set forth in these pages, as also the story of its organization into a separate and distinct Church. The development of the work has been detailed as thoroughly as limited space would allow. Nothing more in the way of history, so far as the Methodist Episcopal Church is concerned, need be added. A few facts as to the extent and strength of the Church at the present time must suffice.

The Methodist Episcopal Church embraces in its fold slightly more than one-third of all the people called Methodists. It is the largest division of Methodism, and by far the strongest denomination of Protestants in the United States. Its preachers and members are found in well-nigh every civilized land, and in every heathen country that is open to missionary work. The Church to-day is as vigorous, as active, and as aggressive as at any period of its history. The fathers of the Church were never more determined to conquer this world for Christ than are the sons. The latest statistics, found in the Methodist Yearbook for 1900, are as follows: Annual Conferences, 148; traveling preachers, 17,583; local preachers, 14,289; members, 2,871,949; Sunday schools, 31,836; officers and teachers, 346,063; scholars, 2,660,339; number of churches, 26,986, valued



at \$116,275,007; number of parsonages, 10,931, valued at \$18,341,811. In addition, there are twenty-four bishops, including five missionary bishops, who have the general oversight of this great Church.

#### THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH.

From the planting of Methodism in America to the General Conference of 1844, a period of more than seventy-five years, there had never occurred anything like a division. There had been a few disturbances, resulting in the secession of a greater or less number of preachers and people, and the organization of feeble bodies bearing the name of Methodist. None of these secessions amounted to a disruption, or for a moment checked the progress of the Church. But there existed constant agitation and friction over the subject of slavery, which threatened the harmony of the connection. The agitation culminated in 1844.

During the quadrennium beginning in 1840, Rev. Francis A. Harding, of the Baltimore Conference, married a lady who was the owner of slaves. The Conference demanded that he take steps to set the slaves free. This he failed to do, and the Conference suspended

him from the ministry. He took an appeal to the ensuing General Conference (1844), which, after three days' consideration, confirmed the action of the Baltimore Conference. This was the first time in the history of the Church that the General Conference had been called to act in its judicial capacity on a case involving slavery. The disposition of the appeal—the vote refusing to reverse the action of the Baltimore Conference standing 117 to 56—indicated the sentiment and temper of the majority, and at once aroused fears of a storm, which in a few days broke in fury upon the Conference. It was foreseen that the decision, whatever it might be, would have its bearing on the case of Bishop Andrew, who, like Mr. Harding, had become connected with slavery by marriage. Excitement was intense. It was evident to all that a crisis had come.

Seeing it was necessary to allay strife or suffer the evils of disruption and alienation, Dr. William Capers, of South Carolina, one of the three General Secretaries of the Missionary Society, also under censure of the New Hampshire Conference because he was “a slaveholder,” proposed “that a committee of six be appointed to confer with the bishops, and report within two days, as to the possi-

bility of adopting some plan, and what, for the permanent pacification of the Church." The proposition was accepted and the committee appointed. This committee, instead of reporting "within two days," did not report until after the expiration of four days; then Bishop Soule, instructed by the committee, reported inability "to agree upon any plan of compromise to reconcile the views of the Northern and Southern Conferences."

Failing to effect a compromise, the Conference made ready to meet the issue. The Committee on Episcopacy were instructed to ascertain the facts in regard to Bishop Andrew's connection with slavery, and "report the results of their investigations." Accordingly, Bishop Andrew, after an interview, submitted to the committee a written statement embracing all the facts. This statement, at the appointed time, was presented to the Conference by Dr. Robert Paine, chairman, as the report of the committee. Bishop Andrew's statement showed that he was the legal owner of two slaves, but that neither one was his by his own consent. He could not manumit them because the laws of the state of Georgia would not allow it. One of these, he said, was free to leave whenever she felt disposed. The

other, said the bishop, "shall be at liberty to leave the state whenever I shall be satisfied that he is prepared to provide for himself, or I can have sufficient security that he will be protected and provided for in the place to which he may go." As to the servants owned by his wife, he had "no legal responsibility"; and as she could "not emancipate them if she desired," he was obliged to remain connected with slavery.

The report of the committee was made to the Conference on May 22, and on motion was laid over until the next day. When reached in the order of business, the following resolution was offered:

*Resolved*, That the Rev. James O. Andrew be, and he is hereby affectionately, requested to resign his office as one of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

After discussing this resolution the greater part of two days, it was substituted by another in the following language:

Whereas the Discipline of our Church forbids the doing anything calculated to destroy our itinerant general superintendency; and whereas Bishop Andrew has become connected with slavery by marriage and otherwise; and this act having drawn after it circumstances which, in the estimation of the General

Conference, will greatly embarrass the exercise of his office as an itinerant general superintendent, if not in some places entirely prevent it: therefore,

*Resolved*, That it is the sense of this General Conference that he desist from the exercise of this office so long as this impediment remains.

This resolution, after full discussion, was adopted by a vote of 111 to 69. The die was cast. The debate had clearly disclosed what would be the result of the adoption of the resolution. After its passage, as if alarmed at the predictions that had been made, and to avert calamity, resolutions were offered declaring the action not mandatory, but advisory, "and postponing its final disposition, according to the suggestion of the bishops." These resolutions were laid on the table.

The action of the majority was followed by a "Declaration" from the Southern delegates in which they took the ground that the proceedings against Bishop Andrew were extrajudicial, in that they virtually suspended him from office without formal charge or trial, and that such proceedings would produce a state of things that would not further tolerate the jurisdiction of the Methodist Episcopal Church over the Conferences in the slaveholding states. This "Declaration" was followed by

the appointment of a committee of nine, with instructions, on motion of Dr. John B. McFerrin, "to devise, if possible, a constitutional plan for a mutual and friendly division of the Church." This final step was to be taken only in the event of failure on the part of the committee to "devise a plan for an amicable adjustment of the difficulties existing in the Church on the subject of slavery."

Previous to this appointment of the committee of nine, resolutions were offered proposing two General Conferences, but they failed. The committee also failed to find a way for the amicable adjustment of difficulties, and reported a Plan of Separation, which, on motion of Dr. Elliott, of Cincinnati, was adopted. The vote in favor of the Plan was nearly unanimous. It was advocated and voted for by the strongest men of the North. The Conference adjourned, not without feelings of sadness, but in peace, believing that the troubles in the Church had ended.

As the Plan of Separation provided not only for the division of the membership and relinquishment of the jurisdiction of the Methodist Episcopal Church over the Southern Conferences except such as might elect to remain in the Methodist Episcopal Church, but also for

an equitable division of the property in the Book Concerns of New York and Cincinnati, and the Chartered Fund (a fund for the relief of preachers, their wives, widows, and children), it became necessary for the South to effect organization. The Southern delegates very properly took the initiative. They called for a Convention of the Annual Conferences to meet in Louisville, Ky., May 1, 1845. The Convention met at the appointed time, and, "acting under the Plan of Separation, declared the Southern Conferences there represented a distinct connection, under the style of 'The Methodist Episcopal Church, South.'" (McClintock and Strong's Cyclopædia.) Sixteen Annual Conferences were represented, with a membership, white and colored, numbering nearly five hundred thousand.

Bishops Soule and Andrew were recognized as regular and constitutional superintendents, and as such were invited to become bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Bishop Andrew complied with the request immediately. Bishop Soule's sympathies were with the movement, but he did not give in his formal adherence until the meeting of the General Conference in Petersburg, Va., May, 1846, which Conference had been provided for

by the Convention. A letter announcing his purpose was read to the General Conference on the second day of the session.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, now fully organized, had entered upon a career of unprecedented prosperity. But trouble was ahead. The Plan of Separation was not fully indorsed in the North, and the ensuing General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which met in 1848, declared it "unconstitutional" and "null and void." The commissioners, three from each division of the Church, appointed to carry out the wishes of the General Conference of 1844, could do nothing. This made an appeal to the civil courts necessary. Suit was instituted in the United States Circuit Courts of New York and Ohio. In the New York court decision was in favor of the South, and in the Ohio court against. In the latter case appeal was taken to the United States Supreme Court, where, in 1854, the judgment of the Ohio court was unanimously reversed, and the Plan of Separation ordered enforced in all its provisions and particulars. The judgment of the court was duly executed. Thus closed the saddest chapter in the history of American Methodism.



At the completion of the organization of the Southern Methodist Church in 1846, there were traveling preachers, 1,519; local preachers, 2,833; white members, 327,284; colored members, 124,961; Indian members, 2,972; a total of 459,569. In 1860 these figures were swelled to 757,209. In 1866, as a result of the Civil War, the numbers were reduced to 418,164; a loss of 276,145.

The statistics for 1899 are as follows: Traveling preachers, 6,120; local preachers, 5,329; members, 1,464,808;<sup>1</sup> Sunday schools, 13,940½; Sunday-school teachers, 102,723; Sunday-school scholars, 849,101; houses of worship, 305½; parsonages, 3,692; value of churches and parsonages, \$26,042,335.

This history is closed with the closing sentences of Bishop Hendrix's fraternal address, delivered before the British Wesleyan Conference, July 30, 1900:

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<sup>1</sup>These figures do not include colored members. At the close of the war many thousands of the colored members of the Southern Church went into the Methodist Episcopal Church. Those remaining were set off to themselves with all their property in the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, which now has more than two thousand preachers and more than two hundred thousand members.

There was another "man sent from God whose name was John," John Wesley, through whose work in England and her colonies there are more Methodists and adherents in the world to-day than there were English-speaking people when Wesley began his appointed work after that memorable 24th of May, as Paul and Luther spoke to him through the great Epistle to the Romans of the gospel that saves unto the utmost. What apostolic hands were these laid upon Wesley's head, whose sons are heard preaching the gospel in more tongues to-day than were spoken in the Roman empire in the day of its widest extent, while American Methodists alone, at the end of a century and a half, outnumber the entire census of Christianity at the end of the first three centuries!

At the time Methodism began her work in America, the Congregationalist, the Episcopal, and the Dutch Reformed Churches had each been at work in our land for more than a hundred years. The Baptists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans had been with us also from before the birth of Wesley. Despite that three of these were the established Churches of their several localities, our great land still waited for Methodism. Starting in last of all and more than a century behind several of the great Protestant Churches, Methodism to-day outnumbers any other Protestant Church in America by a million and a half of communicants.



